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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF AESTHETIC PERCEPTION

by

NANCY SUZAN LARGENT (C)

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "An Epistemological Investigation of Aesthetic Perception" submitted by Nancy Suzan Largent in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an attempt to apply epistemology to aesthetics. Its primary aim is to provide a general account of the workings of perception in terms of which sense can best be made of the workings of aesthetic perception. The thesis is divided into three chapters and a conclusion, with the following contents.

Chapter 1 sets up the problem. It offers an account of Frank Sibley's theories about aesthetic taste. The primary question is how it is possible to distinguish the aesthetic features of an aesthetic object. The answer offered is that it is possible to perceive aesthetic features. The question then becomes how it is possible to perceive aesthetic features; in what sense, if any, aesthetic perception differs from ordinary eyesight and hearing.

Chapter 2 provides a general account of perception derived from the epistemology of Michael Polanyi, with some reference to theories of perception held by gestalt psychology. This account ultimately describes perception as the perception of wholes, and it describes the process of perception as a gestalt formation process.

Chapter 3 provides a foundation on which an account of aesthetic perception could be erected. It does this by suggesting the lines which would have to be taken to provide an account of aesthetic perception as a process of formation of aesthetic gestalten. It is an interesting sidelight of this chapter that it shows that the difference between aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception is not as great as has commonly been supposed.

The Conclusion briefly sketches out the relevance of this account of aesthetic perception to three important controversies in aesthetics. (1) The question of what constitutes the aesthetic object. (2) Isolationism versus contextualism. (3) Objectivity versus subjectivity.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is an attempt to apply epistemology to aesthetics. More specifically, it is an attempt to give an account of perception in terms of which sense can be made of aesthetic perception. The thesis itself is divided into three chapters and a conclusion. By way of introduction, I shall provide here a brief sketch of the contents of each.

Chapter 1 sets up the problem. In it, I offer an account of Frank Sibley's theories about aesthetic taste. Briefly put, his main points are these: (1) There is a distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features. (2) Taste is the ability to perceive that an aesthetic object has aesthetic features. Not only is taste not the ability to infer the existence of aesthetic features from the existence of non-aesthetic features, but it is not possible to infer the existence of aesthetic features from that of non-aesthetic features. (3) While there is a relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features such that aesthetic features depend for their existence upon non-aesthetic features, the relationship is not one of logical dependence.

For the most part, though perhaps not without slight modifications, I am in agreement with Sibley on these points. My primary disagreement with Sibley is that he fails to provide us with any account of aesthetic perception. He maintains, after all, that we determine the existence of aesthetic features by means of aesthetic perception. It is unfortunate, given the significance of this claim, that the only account offered of aesthetic perception is that it is that perception which enables us to perceive the aesthetic features of an aesthetic object. He declines to say <u>how</u> we should be able to do this. This is not merely inadequate. It is woefully circular. What is needed to end this circularity and sustain Sibley's main points is an account of the workings of perception which will enable us to make sense of aesthetic perception. Furthermore, what is needed is an account of perception which will enable us to explain why we cannot infer the existence of aesthetic features from the existence of non-aesthetic features.

Perhaps this is the place to make one thing clear before any possible confusion can come of it. What Sibley means--and what I mean--here by aesthetic features is those features of aesthetic objects which are perceivable. There are also, of course, aesthetic features which are evaluative, and there are also aesthetic features which are interpretive. The determination that

an aesthetic object has features of these last two kinds is, at least in part, the result of judgment. The account here offered is not intended to refer to such features as these, but only to those aesthetic features which are sensory. In view of this reservation, it should be clear that no attempt is here being made to reduce aesthetic evaluation or aesthetic interpretation to aesthetic perception. Though it is not impossible that a coherent account of aesthetic perception might prove helpful in dealing with the issues of evaluation and interpretation in aesthetics.

Chapter 2 provides an account of perception in terms of which it becomes possible to make sense of aesthetic perception. I offer an account of perception derived from the epistemology of Michael Polanyi, with some reference to theories of perception held by gestalt psychology. This leads me ultimately to describe perception as the perception of wholes, and to describe the process of perception as a process of gestalt formation. For my purposes, the most important feature of this account is the point that in the formation of a perceptual gestalt, one significant determining factor is the contribution made by the perceiver, the way in which the object is seen. The way in which the object is seen, which I call our manner of perceiving, is determined by all sorts of influences, physiological, psychological,

sociological, etc., any or all of which contribute to the perceived whole. This account of perception has the additional advantage of enabling us to explain why no perceived whole can ever be inferred from a list of its parts, a necessary factor if we wish to preserve one of the most significant features of Sibley's account of taste.

Chapter 3 provides a foundation on which an account of aesthetic perception could be erected. When I began this thesis, I hoped myself to provide the complete account, rather than merely to dig the foundations. But I have found it necessary to modify my claims. It proved to be beyond my powers adequately to characterize the aesthetic, at least within the scope of this thesis. The reason for my difficulty should become clear in a moment. In the formation of a perceptual gestalt, the single most important determining factor is the way in which the object is perceived. It is because our manner of perceiving is aesthetic that we perceive anything aesthetically, just as a non-aesthetic manner of perceiving results in our perceiving anything non-aesthetically. So that to give a complete account of aesthetic perception, a complete account of the aesthetic manner of perceiving would have to be provided. It has already been pointed out that our manner of perceiving is determined by influences of numerous kinds. The

characterizations of the aesthetic apropos of emotional factors, cultural factors, etc. are multitudinous in aesthetic literature. Any attempt to provide a complete listing of such characterizations, let alone to argue conclusively for any group of them, would have required another thesis, and a vast one at that. I have, therefore, attempted only to suggest the lines which would have to be taken to provide an account of aesthetic perception as a process of formation of aesthetic gestalten. I think, that I have shown that an account of aesthetic perception along those lines is the account needed.

There is a sense, however, in which my modified claim, far from being weakened, has been strengthened. There has been a strong tendency for too long among aestheticians to regard aesthetic perception as another sense, almost completely isolated from ordinary eyesight, hearing, etc. Polanyi's account of perception shows us that, on the contrary, both aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception are variations on the same theme of perception as a gestalt formation process. This is not to say there are no differences between the two, but it is to say quite strongly that they are nowhere near as different as they have commonly been supposed to be. The fact that the distinction is not all that sharply demarcated, far from making it more difficult to

characterize aesthetic perception, should, in the long run, make it a far simpler task.

Besides the above, chapter 3 considers the question of why we are unable to infer the existence of aesthetic features from non-aesthetic features. Not only are we enabled to cope with that phenomenon, but we are also enabled to give an account of the relationship of aesthetic features to aesthetic features.

Finally, chapter 3 considers the extent to which Frank Sibley would be likely to agree or disagree with the account offered in this thesis.

The Conclusion briefly sketches out the relevance of this account of aesthetic perception to three important controversies in aesthetics. (1) The question of what constitutes the aesthetic object. (2) Isolationism versus Contextualism. (3) Objectivity versus subjectivity. Aestheticians have displayed strong tendencies to run to extremes when confronted with these issues. It is perhaps not the least advantage of this account that it suggests possible middle-of-the-road positions with regard to each of these controversial issues.

CHAPTER 1

To begin with, it will of course be necessary to give an account of Frank Sibley's notion of taste. The following account is taken primarily from his articles "Aesthetic Concepts" and "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," with some reference to "Colours" and "Objectivity in Aesthetics."

Central to Sibley's work in aesthetics is the distinction he draws between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features of works of art, with a corresponding distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic terms. It is a broad distinction which Sibley first makes by means of examples of the sorts of judgments, terms, and features involved. For example, judgments about color, subject matter, sound, wording, etc. are not ordinarily considered to involve aesthetic judgment. Similarly, colors, notes, etc. are ordinarily considered not to be aesthetic features, nor is red nor E_b necessarily an aesthetic term. On the other hand, the judgment that something is graceful, dainty, garish, or balanced is an aesthetic judgment. Similarly, grace, balance, etc. are aesthetic features, and those terms by which they are referred to are aesthetic terms. Sibley does not claim that the distinction is perfectly black and white, acknowledging that

there is a borderline area of debatable cases between the two poles of the distinction.

Sibley does not directly defend the distinction beyond giving his examples, maintaining that he can see no need to do so. "To deny such a distinction is to be precluded from discussing most questions of aesthetics at all. Just as one could hardly begin ethics without the prior recognition that some judgments and notions do, while others do not, concern morality,"[1] one must accept that some judgments are concerned with aesthetic issues and some are not. However, since a great deal of his work is dedicated to making sense of the distinction--that is, pointing out the sorts of relationships between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features, terms, and judgments; explaining in detail in what respects aesthetic judgments differ from non-aesthetics; etc.---it could be maintained that the body of his work itself constitutes an indirect defense of the distinction. For certainly a clear and thorough exposition of what is involved in the making of a distinction cannot but add to its plausibility.

One of the first points on which Sibley insists is that aesthetics involves perception of a certain kind.

> People have to <u>see</u> the grace or unity of a work, <u>hear</u> the plaintiveness or frenzy in the music, <u>notice</u> the gaudiness of a color scheme, <u>feel</u> the

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[1]Frank N. Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," <u>Philosophical Review</u>, 1965, p. 135.

> power of a novel, its mood, or its uncertainty of tone. . . . Merely to learn from others, on good authority, that the music is serene, the play moving, or the picture unbalanced is of little aesthetic value; the crucial thing is to see, hear or feel. To suppose indeed that one can make aesthetic judgments without aesthetic perception, say, by following rules of some kind, is to misunderstand aesthetic judgment.[2]

The perception of which Sibley speaks, however, should not be mistaken for perception in the most ordinary sense. It is equally true of certain sorts of non-aesthetic judgments, for example, color judgments, that perception is involved in making them. A color-blind man judging something to be red would not be making the same sort of judgment a color-sighted man would make in the same situation, even if both correctly made the same judgment. More is meant by perception in Sibley's work on aesthetic judgment than eyesight, hearing, etc. Sibley says with regard to aesthetic terms that often "people with normal intelligence and good eyesight and hearing lack, at least in some measure, the sensitivity required to apply them."[3] What, then, is aesthetic perception? Sibley seems to think that it is the ability to see that various things either do or do not have various aesthetic qualities. This ability is sometimes called taste.

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[2]Ibid., p. 137.

[3]Frank N. Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," Philosophical Review, 1959, p. 65.

To remove some of the circularity from this notion of aesthetic perception, it may be helpful to consider in somewhat more detail aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities and in particular the relationships obtaining between them. In the first place, Sibley says that there are the following four relationships of dependence between aesthetic and non-aesthetic qualities, the first two of which refer to aesthetic features in general: (1) Aesthetic features are dependent for their existence upon non-aesthetic features, but not vice versa. That is, aesthetic features cannot occur in isolation from non-aesthetic features, although non-aesthetic features can--and it would seem frequently do--occur in isolation from aesthetic features. (2) The aesthetic features of a thing are determined by its non-aesthetic features. It is in this sense that aesthetic qualities are emergent qualities. It may be noted in passing that (1) is entailed by (2). The two remaining sorts of relationships hold in the cases of specific objects: (3) "(T)he particular aesthetic character of something may be said to result from the totality of its relevant non-aesthetic characters."[4] This is to say that several non-aesthetic features of a work may together be responsible for its aesthetic

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[4]Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," p. 138.

Character, such that no one of them could be altered without altering that specific aesthetic character of the work for which they are responsible. Sibley calls this sort of relationship total specific dependence. (4) It is possible that some one non-aesthetic feature in particular may be wholly or chiefly responsible for some specific aesthetic character of that work. Sibley calls this sort of relationship notable specific dependence.

But these relationships of dependence should not be regarded as examples of logical[5] dependence. That the dependence is not logical is the point most basic to Sibley's entire position, a point on which he lays heavy stress.

> There are no sufficient conditions, no non-aesthetic features such that some set or number of them will beyond question logically justify or warrant the application of an aesthetic term. It is impossible to make any statements corresponding to those we can make for condition-governed words.[6]

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[5]It is worthwhile to point out here, before possible confusion can arise, that Sibley uses the term "logical" in a fairly strict sense, more or less deductive. He has in mind, when he uses it, making judgments by means of necessary and sufficient criteria. He does not mean logical in the looser inductive sense, in which we can logically make reasonable inferences in spite of having no necessary and sufficient criteria. In this latter sense it would be perfectly logical for us to expect to perceive something given certain conditions, though it would not be so in the former sense. It might well be argued that Sibley uses the term in too strict a sense. Nevertheless, this is the way in which he uses it, so that it behooves me, in discussing his work, to conform to it myself.

[6]Sibley, "Aesthetic Concepts," p. 67.

What this means in practice is that even after a list (any list) of non-aesthetic terms has been applied to a work of art, no matter how comprehensive and critically correct that list might be, it remains legitimate procedure to ask whether or not an associated aesthetic term applies. For example, even after being informed that a painting is made up of pastel colors, gently waving lines, etc., it remains legitimate to ask whether that painting is delicate. Yet if this is the case, if the dependence of the aesthetic on the non-aesthetic is not a logical, condition-governed dependence, how can there be a rational justification for any aesthetic judgment?

This question brings the discussion back to Sibley's notion of aesthetic perception. He wishes to maintain that because the proper foundation for aesthetic judgment is the ability to hear or see aesthetic features of a work of art, the very model of necessary and sufficient conditions does not and cannot be made to apply to it. Perceptions cannot be supported on the basis of good reasoning. "I may have good reasons for thinking something is graceful, but not reasons for seeing it."[7] Sibley considers that two activities are often confused by those who insist that aesthetic

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[7]Sibley, "Aesthetic and Non-Aesthetic," p. 144.

judgments must have the support of being rationally derived, or at least rationally derivable. They confuse such rational derivation with the activity of the good critic who, having already perceived a work of art to have certain aesthetic qualities, should be able to say why it has those qualities.

This of course makes it impossible to infer strictly on the grounds of a work of art's non-aesthetic qualities that it has any particular aesthetic quality. It does not, however, mean that there are no logical connections whatsoever between aesthetic and non-aesthetic concepts. In fact, Sibley thinks it obvious that there are such connections in certain senses: (1) For there to be some aesthetic qualities, it would seem that certain non-aesthetic qualities are logically necessary. For example, if there were only pale colors, there would be no gaudy paintings. (2) Some aesthetic qualities would seem to logically presuppose certain non-aesthetic qualities. For example, the quality of balance seems to presuppose the existence of parts in a certain relationship. It is the converse of (1) and (2) that Sibley wishes vehemently to deny. (3) Furthermore, it should be noted that certain non-aesthetic features may be logically sufficient to render impossible some aesthetic features in a work. That is to say that there may be negative conditions governing a work. For example, if a

painting contains only pale colors, it would be absurd to maintain that the painting was garish. (4) Finally, it is obvious that there are numerous characteristic associations between aesthetic and non-aesthetic concepts. So strong are these associations that the presence of certain non-aesthetic qualities render it likely (in varying degrees of likelihood) that a certain aesthetic quality will be present in the work. For example, "sad" music is very likely to be soft and slow. However, the placement made by many critics of the "Apassionata" of Beethoven in the class of sad music suggests it is not logically inconceivable that fast music might be sad. These are among the ways in which aesthetic concepts may be logically related to other concepts, although they are not governed by conditions in the sense discussed earlier.

If the applicability of the terms in our aesthetic vocabulary cannot be settled by an appeal to conditions, other than in the senses just discussed, the question arises just how it is possible to know that any particular term is applicable in any particular case. The successful aesthetic judgment, according to Sibley, involves perception, so that the question becomes one of how people come to see, hear, etc. that various aesthetic terms are applicable to various works of art. In "Aesthetic Concepts" Sibley offers the following list of ways in

which critics etc. may help others to arrive at a perception of an aesthetic quality: (1) It is sometimes possible to succeed in bringing someone to perceive the aesthetic qualities of a work of art by bringing to his attention those important non-aesthetic features of the work which cause it to have its aesthetic features. (2) On the other hand, it may be sufficient merely to mention the aesthetic features which the critic hopes to help the person to perceive. (3) Most often, the linkage of certain non-aesthetic features with certain aesthetic features will be pointed out. Any of the numerous characteristic associations between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features might be pointed out here with good effect. (4) The use of various similes and metaphors is a well-known tool of aesthetic criticism and explanation. (5) Contrasts, comparisons, and anecdotes may be made use of also, and can be particularly effective if the critic knows something about the background, susceptibilities, etc. of his audience. It is obvious that someone familiar with two schools of art, say for instance classical symphonies and acid rock, is quite likely to be able to help someone familiar with one and baffled by the other by drawing parallels, etc., where they exist to be drawn. (6) Repeatedly drawing the audience's attention to the same features of a work, saying the same things in different ways, are helpful here as in

almost any attempt at almost any kind of explanation. (7) Finally, the critic's behavior may sometimes prove to be the key which enables someone to see or hear for himself an aesthetic feature of a work of art. Gestures, expressions, tones of voice, etc. may all be helpful in this regard.

These seven possibilities are offered as ways in which the critic or any person with taste may aid the person less skilled in making aesthetic judgments to arrive at a point where he too is able to perceive the aesthetic qualities of works of art. It is fairly clear that these methods are not such as would enable one to arrive at strictly reasoned conclusions. This should not be particularly troublesome to those who accept Sibley's position that a chain of entailment reasoning is hardly the way to support a perception. But it perhaps remains to be asked whether there is any reason why these particular methods should be the ones which enable a person to communicate what he has perceived to the person who has not yet perceived it. This is a question Sibley does not think it necessary to pursue. "To go on to ask how these methods can possibly succeed is to begin to ask how people can ever be brought to see aesthetic (and Gestalt and other similar) properties at all. . . . We do these things. . . ."[8] When we are able to do these

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[8]Ibid., p. 142.

things we are supposed to have taste. But what taste itself is, Sibley does not attempt to say.

To sum up, it is Sibley's firmly held belief that there can be no successful aesthetic judgments made without some appeal to aesthetic perception. Because he holds this to be the case, he also maintains that there is no way in which an aesthetic judgment may be proven true by any appeal to rules or conditions. He claims not to be at all surprised by this, but merely to have tried to show some of what lies behind it. How well he has shown what lies behind it needs now to be considered.

Before I begin this examination of Sibley's account of taste, I should like to excuse myself at least for the time being from examining some of the questions that might reasonably be expected to arise in the course of such an investigation. These questions are scarcely uninteresting or unworthy of being more closely examined, but they are of secondary importance as regards the purposes of this thesis. I shall be investigating to begin with only those problematic points which seem to me to be crucial. Among those points not immediately crucial is Sibley's discussion of the particular senses in which he does believe certain non-aesthetic concepts to be logically bound to aesthetic concepts, negative condition-governance etc. I am far more concerned with the claim that the existence of aesthetic features cannot

be inferred from non-aesthetic than that non-aesthetic may sometimes be inferred from aesthetic. Nor am I interested in discussing the claim that non-aesthetic and aesthetic features are frequently associated, a truth so obvious that it requires little investigation. The basis for such associations, of course, is far less obvious and of greater importance. It will be gone into further after subsequent investigation has helped to establish that basis.

To begin with, perhaps I should say a word about the distinction which Sibley makes--or rather assumes--between aesthetic and non-aesthetic terms and their correlate features. In the first place, it must be admitted that the distinction is far from being the most clear-cut ever made by a philosopher. It would be hard to say just where the non-aesthetic ends and the aesthetic begins. For example, while aesthetics is considered to have to do with works of art, so-called aesthetic terms crop up quite frequently in discussions which have nothing to do with works of art per se. Many a term seems to function equally well in aesthetic and non-aesthetic senses, although it is worth pointing out that the same term can often undergo subtle changes of meaning with such a change of context.

However, the existence of a grey area between the poles of a distinction only makes it necessary to use

that distinction with care, not to discard it, particularly if the distinction is a useful one. Suffice it to say that there does seem to be one area of language consisting of specialized and not-so-specialized terms frequently used by persons concerned to discuss works in the various fields of music, painting, sculpture, literature, architecture, etc. This language might be roughly delimited as the language of art criticism. To be sure, it is not the sole language of the art critic nor is it his exclusive property. It would be an incompetent architect who knew nothing about elegance and simplicity. It would be an incompetent critic of architecture who knew nothing about structural engineering. Nevertheless, such terms as elegance, beauty, delicacy, insipidity, etc. can be fairly easily recognized as belonging to this area of language, whereas such terms as red, long, heavy, thick, etc. belong fairly clearly to another.

The important question about this distinction would seem to be just what significant differences there are between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features. Sibley, it has been pointed out, considers that aesthetic features can be discerned by someone with taste or aesthetic perception as opposed to non-aesthetic features, which apparently are discernible by anyone with just ordinarily good eyesight, ordinary good hearing, etc. It seems

reasonable, therefore, to demand of any explication of taste that it explain the difference between aesthetic perception and "ordinary" perception in such a way as to provide some understanding of the differences between these two sorts of features.

It is worth pointing out that when I refer here to ordinary perception as somehow distinct from ordinary perception, I do not mean to imply that aesthetic perception must somehow be strange or esoteric. In fact, I hope to show that aesthetic perception is a perfectly ordinary phenomenon indeed, differing from what we are pleased to call ordinary perception perhaps more in complexity than anything else, and certainly differing from it less than has commonly been supposed. Too many philosophers have tended to consider aesthetic perception esoteric, not to even mention the tendencies of many art critics. Perhaps partly for this reason, aestheticians have too often gone to great lengths too strictly to delimit the aesthetic from the everyday. They have done this in spite of the fact that we make use of aesthetic language, experience aesthetic emotional responses, etc. at least as much in the everyday world as in art galleries. I should like to suggest, at this point, that the distinction has been more strictly made than is necessary. This point will be taken up in greater detail after I have given the account of perception in terms

of which I think we can best make sense of aesthetic perception.

Having drawn his distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic terms and features, Sibley wishes to maintain that whatever other relationships may obtain between them, there is one relationship which does not and cannot so obtain. There is no way in which the existence of any non-aesthetic feature or group of features ever logically justifies the inference that a certain aesthetic feature also exists in any work of art in question. Similarly, there are no conditions logically sufficient to guarantee the applicability of any aesthetic term to any work of art. No matter how complete a description of the work of art in question is given in non-aesthetic terms, the question of the applicability of any aesthetic term, even one commonly considered to be related to those particular non-aesthetic terms, must remain open until other considerations have been brought to bear.

His argument that there are no logically sufficient conditions for the application of aesthetic terms has a certain amount of intuitive force. It does seem to be the case that almost anyone asked to give a logically sufficient definition of an aesthetic term in non-aesthetic terms--or for that matter in any terms at all--would find himself at a loss to do so. Furthermore, it

does seem reasonable to ask why, if the conditions for the application of aesthetic terms do fit into the model of logical sufficiency, there should be so many persons around capable of using such terms--and furthermore of using them well--who never learned to do so in terms of conditions governing their use. It would be a bit like someone answering geometry problems correctly who had never learned any axioms or formulae or rules of application. And then there is the case of those persons who misuse aesthetic terms, for example by calling an insipid painting delicate. Anyone who has ever tried knows how difficult if not impossible it is to make such persons see just where they have erred. But while such examples may tempt one towards agreement with Sibley, they are far from a proof of his position.

To illustrate what seems to me to be Sibley's principle difficulty with this, one of his most central theses, I would like to suggest an analogy between it and what is known in ethics as the open question argument. It is not an analogy I would care to push too far. I do not, for example, intend to imply that a solution to Sibley's difficulty would prove equally applicable in ethics, though it might. I suggest the analogy because I think I can make clear by its more familiar example where Sibley's thesis must be bolstered and begin further to suggest how that bolstering might be done.

The open question argument, very generally put, goes as follows. Some ethicists have argued for naturalistic definitions of moral goodness. That is to say, they have argued that an action, for instance, could be logically inferred to be morally good if it had certain natural properties, such as causing the greatest good for the greatest number. Natural properties here would be analogous to non-aesthetic properties, while moral goodness would be analogous to an aesthetic property. A proponent of the open question argument would maintain to the contrary that no natural property or collection of natural properties would ever be logically sufficient to guarantee the claim that an action or what have you was morally good. No matter how complete the description of the action in terms of natural properties it would still be possible to ask of it, "Is it a good action." The analogy to Sibley's position should be obvious enough to need no spelling out.

The problem with the open question argument is that it is not an argument. Instead, it is the statement of another thesis. For it is only feasible to ask whether an action described in terms of natural properties which usually connote moral goodness is still good only if one is already convinced that no such description can provide a guarantee. John Stuart Mill would fail to see the force of asking of an action which had just been

admitted to provide the greatest good for the greatest number whether it was a morally good action or not. He would only think that the questioner did not understand the nature of moral goodness. The questioner of course would think that it was Mill who did not understand the nature of moral goodness. Mill and the proponent of the open question argument are arguing in terms of different models of explanation.

It is to Sibley's credit that he recognizes that this is a main ground of disagreement between his position and positions which offer similarly naturalistic definitions of aesthetic terms. He himself points out that he is operating in terms of a different model of explanation than that of logically sufficient conditions. The tremendous importance of Sibley's claim that aesthetic judgments must involve perception begins to become clear here. If he is able to make the point that the successful aesthetic judgment must include the perception that the work of art has certain aesthetic features, then his claim that the logical inference of aesthetic from non-aesthetic features is invalid should hold good. For as has already been pointed out, perceptions cannot be supported by good reasons. People do not perceive the features they do as a result of some chain of reasoning, explicit or otherwise.

There are problems with this appeal, however, not the least of which being that Sibley attempts to support it in somewhat circular fashion. Since, he says, we cannot logically infer aesthetic features from non-aesthetic features, we must determine their existence by means of aesthetic perception. What then, we may reasonably ask, is aesthetic perception? We know already that it is not simply that perception by means of which we determine the existence of non-aesthetic features of works of art, for a man may be perfectly capable of doing that and yet be unable to distinguish aesthetic features. Sibley explains that aesthetic perception is that perception which enables us to perceive aesthetic features of works of art. But this is not, after all, terribly helpful. Before we can be asked to take the concept of aesthetic perception seriously, we must be able to understand what it might mean. Otherwise, we are placed in the philosophically unhappy position of postulating something not explained, i.e. aesthetic perception, to solve a sticky problem, i.e. how we are able to determine the existence of aesthetic features of works of art. This pushes the problem back a step, but it does not solve it.

It looks at first glance as though what is most needed here is a coherent account of the workings of aesthetic perception. But there are two problems which

prevent me from stating the thesis in quite those terms. The first problem is as follows. To give anything like a complete account of aesthetic perception would involve a formidable task indeed, far beyond the scope of this thesis. It would ultimately involve, for reasons which should be made clear in the course of the next two chapters, wading through the multitudinous characterizations of the aesthetic already existing in philosophical literature, and even trying to invent more besides! The impossibility of doing this briefly in any worthwhile way is so obvious as to require no demonstration.

The second problem is more interesting, and is ultimately of greater significance. To begin by saying that we need a coherent account of <u>aesthetic</u> perception is to encourage the assumption too often made that the difference between aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception will be vastly significant. I hope, on the contrary, that the general account of perception I am about to offer will make it clear that the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception is not so great as it has often been believed to be. There are differences to be sure, but they are, as has already been suggested, more differences of complexity than anything else. While the influences on our aesthetic and non-aesthetic manners of perceiving may differ, the

fact that there are influences remains the same. This point will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

It is, therefore, the aim of this thesis to provide an account of the workings of perception in general, an account in terms of which, it can be shown, we can best make sense of the workings of aesthetic perception. It is possible, it should be admitted, that this cannot be done without modifying certain points in Sibley's system, though not to such an extent that those points or his system become unrecognizable. Of this point also there will be further discussion.

CHAPTER 2

In my attempt to offer a framework within which some sense can be made of aesthetic perception, I intend to avoid the too common tendency to regard it as somehow fantastical or extraordinary, an isolated phenomenon. I intend instead to show that it is one class of a very everyday type of experience which Michael Polanyi calls tacit knowledge. Just to get us started, I will define tacit knowledge as knowing more than one can tell. Of course the concept of tacit knowledge will become more tightly defined as we go along. I think it not unfair to claim that this is at least in part the dilemma of the man who does know that a work of art has certain features and yet is unable to show this to someone who does not know. That man knows more than he can tell.

It will be necessary to show that Polanyi's tacit knowledge provides us with an account of perception in terms of which we can begin to make sense of aesthetic perception. Such a demonstration will consist primarily in showing the account of tacit knowledge to point the way to solutions of the problems set up in the first chapter. Among other things, it provides an account of perception of terms of which we can begin to differentiate

between aesthetic perception and what we are pleased to call ordinary eyesight, hearing, etc.; suggests reasons why some people should be better able to perceive aesthetically than others; and helps us to explain both why we are unable to infer, in Sibley's sense of infer, the existence of aesthetic features from the existence of non-aesthetic features, and in what sense, nonetheless, aesthetic features are dependent on non-aesthetic features. But to demonstrate these things will be a complex procedure, and I can scarcely begin such a demonstration without first explicating Polanyi's account.

In the first place, I must excuse myself from explicating the entirety of Polanyi's theories on tacit knowledge. Much of his work on the subject consists of applications of the basic theory to such areas as philosophy of science, philosophy of history, etc. and has no relevance to this enquiry. Furthermore, I am not sure I would want to support some of his more extended conclusions. It is his basic epistemology which is relevant here and which I shall now proceed to explicate. I shall be concerned primarily with his theories as stated in two books, The Tacit Dimension and Personal Knowledge, with perhaps some reference to The Study of Man. Polanyi has produced one article dealing with aesthetic questions, "What Is a Painting?", but it seems to presuppose considerable acquaintance with his theories.

Rather than use it to explicate this chapter, I prefer to cite it where applicable in my forthcoming attempt to solve Sibley's problems with tacit knowledge. The paper is only generally applicable to this thesis, its main purpose being to show that art should not be equated with illusion. As Polanyi considers his work allied to some extent with that of the gestalt psychologists, particularly in the area of theories of perception, I will occasionally cite Wolfgang Köhler's Gestalt Psychology for purposes of clarification.

"I shall reconsider human knowledge by starting from the fact that we know more than we can tell."[9] What does Polanyi mean by saying that we know more than we can tell? Let me describe the situation by making use of the situation of knowing someone's physiognomy. Not only is the example of knowing physiognomies a favorite of Polanyi's, but its analogy to aesthetic knowledge can be more easily demonstrated than some of his other favorite examples. Knowledge of physiognomies has the additional advantage of being very much a part of our everyday experience.

Let me take as my example the physiognomy of Susan Haley. I know her physiognomy very well. I would have no trouble picking her out of a group of people

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[9]Michael Polanyi, The Tacit Dimension (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1967), p. 4.

under almost any conceivable circumstances. If she were to be suddenly missing, I could give a good general description of her to the police. But the police would know better than to ask me to tell them what she looked like in such a way that they would be able to tell by looking that a certain girl had to be Susan and could be no one else. Even if I were discussing the matter with a police artist, complete with charts representing numerous variations of features, I could only indicate that some features seemed similar to hers while others did not. If the composite picture thus derived was all the information they had, it would be strange indeed if the police did not find five or six women with similar physiognomies, out of whom I would be expected to pick the real Susan Haley, if the real Susan Haley was there at all.

Even if only one suspect could be found, a suspect greatly resembling the composite, and even if the composite bore a remarkable resemblance to Susan's physiognomy, it would still be necessary for me to make a positive identification. The necessity for me to make a positive identification would seem to be a recognition that I indeed knew more than I could tell. It might be suggested here that the police are simply being zealously exact with regard to details. I hope to make it clear in the course of this chapter that there is more to it than that.

How does Polanyi explain such a phenomenon? "To identify a physiognomy would then amount to relying on our awareness of its features for attending to their joint meaning."[10] Gestalt psychology, to which much of Polanyi's work is linked, would say that when we know a physiognomy, we know a whole, i.e. that physiognomy, by integrating our awareness of its parts, i.e. the features of that physiognomy. But this is of little immediate use because so many of these terms are being used in special senses. At the very least, "whole," "part," "awareness," and "meaning" must be explicated before we can understand this explanation, let alone examine its force.

Ordinarily, a "whole" is considered to be simply the sum of its "parts," a whole orange, for example, to be just a bunch of orange pieces. But this is too simple a view, for the pieces which make up a whole orange must be arranged in a certain way. Otherwise, it would not be a whole orange, but just pieces of orange scattered around. Similarly, a whole in gestalt psychology is not simply the sum of its parts, though without the parts there would be no whole, just as without the pieces of orange there would be no whole orange.

There are many famous examples of parts which can be seen as more than one whole. The goblet/two human faces is one such, wittgenstein's duck/rabbit is another.

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[10]Ibid., p. 12.

No changes take place in these examples to account for their being perceived in such different ways. Whether the duck/rabbit is seen as a duck or as a rabbit seems to have nothing to do with the parts at all, so presumably it must have something to do with the way in which those parts are seen. We must consider ways in which our perception is organized or otherwise influenced in order to explain such anomalies as the duck/rabbit and the goblet/two human faces. These anomalies are important for two reasons. First, they are the most obvious examples that more is needed to explain a whole than its parts. Second, these anomalies direct our attention in the right direction. They direct us to ask not what it is about the thing being seen which brings us to see it in such different ways, but what the influences are on how we see.

There is nothing new about such an observation. At least since Kant set forth to demonstrate the existence of synthetic <u>a priori</u> knowledge, the categories of the understanding, philosophers have been alert to the difficulty of explaining all human knowledge in terms of the principles of logic and pure empirical data (whatever that might be) alone. Gestalt also casts doubt on the possibility of purity for any empirical data by demonstrating the manifold ways in which influences on the one who sees shape what he sees. (Influences is a very

broad term selected precisely because it is broad. I want to leave open as possibilities everything from the necessary to the random, from genes to experience.) Polanyi takes up the same line of reasoning, but with important differences. Unlike Kant, he is not looking for any necessary categories of understanding, though he would not preclude the possibility that some influences are more likely than others to affect what we see. And he is interested in external as well as internal influences. Many gestalt psychologists hold that perception can be explained as the result of purely mechanical processes with nothing of volition about them. While he does not go to the opposite extreme, Polanyi does not think it out of place to speak of methods, skills, etc., of which more later. Polanyi also differs with many of the specific theories of gestalt, rejecting isomorphism, for example, as unnecessary.

The analysis of "meaning" is linked in Polanyi's work to the analysis of "awareness," for the realization that there are two kinds of awareness of particulars enables us to recognize that there are two kinds of meaning. It is not being claimed, by the way, that these two kinds of awareness and two kinds of meaning exhaust the categories. What, then, are these two kinds of awareness? Returning to our example of physiognomies, the first, focal awareness, would be direct awareness of

awareness of the particulars of a physiognomy. For example, if I were peering at Susan's eyes in order to determine precisely what color they were, I could be said to have a focal awareness of Susan's eyes. I would be aware of the particulars in themselves rather than as subsidiary to a whole. The second kind of awareness is subsidiary awareness. In subsidiary awareness a shift takes place from the particulars in themselves to the whole of which they are the parts. It is the difference between my being aware of Susan's eyes, nose, hair, etc. and my being aware of her physiognomy. It should be made clear here that Polanyi is not claiming that I see anything besides Susan's eyes, nose, hair, etc.; if it were not for those particulars Susan would not have a physiognomy at all. What has changed is the manner in which I am aware of those particulars, i.e. in terms of the whole on which my attention is now fixed.

It is possible to make a mistake here thanks to some of our ordinary associations, the mistake of identifying subsidiary awareness with some degree of consciousness, perhaps with unconscious awareness or pre-conscious awareness, or some fringe area of awareness. Polanyi makes it clear that the concept should not be understood in this way. "What makes an awareness subsidiary is the <u>function it fulfills</u>; it can have any degree of consciousness so long as it functions as a clue

to the object of our focal attention."[11] Nor is focal awareness of a whole necessarily a matter of direct awareness, of careful attention, etc. It is perfectly possible to be scarcely conscious of a perceived whole, and yet to be focally aware of it. We may not notice the background music of a film at all (indeed, if properly handled, we often should not), yet we hear music nonetheless, not random notes, but notes constituting a structured, tuneful whole.

What, then, are the two kinds of meaning to which these two kinds of awareness correspond? When our awareness of particulars is focal, then those particulars according to Polanyi have representative or denotative meaning. When our awareness of particulars is subsidiary to our awareness of the whole, then that whole has existential meaning. Now this is somewhat problematic, for in current philosophical usage, it is language which has meaning. Furthermore, in current usage, meaning is understood rather than perceived. If in Polanyi's account meaning is sometimes something which can be seen or heard--which it must be if his account is to be used to solve Sibley's problems--then just what he means by it must be explained. As Polanyi uses the term with regard to the meaning of perceptions, it has to do primarily with sensory organization.

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[11]Ibid., p. 96.

The point has already been made but can stand a little emphasis that there is more involved in human knowledge than deductions and inferences drawn from empirical data. When someone asks you how you know that is a tree over there, and you reply that you know because you see it, you are not making an inference. No one ever saw the celebrated patch of blue unless it was on a quilt or between two clouds. I am not claiming that there is no place in philosophy of perception for any kind of sense data; there may very well be. The point is that we do not see things by patches, hear sounds by phonemes, etc. We see trees or people or paintings, hear words or symphonies. At the very least, by the time we see or hear whatever we are seeing or hearing, our perceptions are arranged in some sort of orderly way, into figures and backgrounds, for example, or into melodic tunes. In that sense and in senses even more complex, our perceptions have meaning.

"In most visual fields, the contents of particular areas 'belong together' as circumscribed units from which their surroundings are excluded."[12] There are boundaries and groupings and relationships in what we see. Furthermore, some of these more elementary groupings, etc. are not later introductions made into a uniform and continuous

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[12]Wolfgang Kohler, Gestalt Psychology (New York: The New American Library, Inc., 1947), pp. 80-81.

flow of sensations for pragmatic purposes (William James) or by force of habit (David Hume) but are present from the very first. In experiments cited by Wolfgang Köhler,[13] congenitally blind adults whose blindness had been corrected by operations were able to perceive specific entities rather than just sensations from the very first. In most cases the subjects had to learn what the thing was, a table or a chair for example, but they did not have to learn what a thing was. They were not confronted with an unbroken flow of sensations which it could then be learned were things.

But this is only the beginning as concerns the complexity of our perception. Relationships are also seen or heard rather than inferred. There is a box of Kleenex and a coffee cup on the back of my desk, and I see them not only in relation to each other, but in relation to the desk and to the wall behind them. There is no need for an elaborate inferential model to explain this phenomenon. I know they are beside each other and in front of the wall because I see them there. It may be maintained here that at least some relationships one must learn to see. I have no complaint with that. My complaint is with the accompanying assumption that such relationships are learned by making inferences.

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[13]Ibid., p. 88.

Let us consider the implications of the following experiment, cited by Polanyi in Personal Knowledge.[14] In this experiment, subjects were placed so that they could see only a spherical object against an utterly blank background. The spherical object, unknown to the subjects, was an inflatable ball. When the ball was inflated from behind, it was seen as if it retained its size and was instead coming nearer. What is most interesting about this is that in order to see the ball coming nearer rather than increasing in size, defects in the quality and position of the retinal image that would ordinarily not be accepted by the eye had to be accepted. The conclusion would seem to be that the subjects proceeded to override the standards of correct vision and see the ball coming toward them rather than suddenly expanding simply because people don't ordinarily expect to see spherical objects suddenly expand. After all, it doesn't happen very often, and the subjects had no contrasting figure in terms of which its change in size would have been visible. It seems that there is a pressing requirement here that what we see must make sense, behave in a reasonable fashion. Tennis balls have no right to go around blowing themselves up to the size of basketballs.

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[14]Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 96.

The phenomenon of the expanding ball involves our expectations; it is reasonable to think of it as involving learning. Introduced into the processes of perception are expectations, associations, conditioned responses, and everything else that our past experience can introduce. These things do not influence our thoughts and inferences alone. They influence how we see what we see. It is influences such as those I have described in the last two pages which will be meant when I refer to our manner of perceiving. Such influences may be learned or something we are born with, physiological or mental, but they are all alike in that they are influences on our perception.

"Perception is a comprehension of clues in terms of a whole."[15] Polanyi considers it the most impoverished form of tacit knowledge, but as we have seen, even this impoverished form is complex indeed. We may henceforth adopt as our definition of tacit knowledge, knowledge obtained by comprehending clues in terms of a whole. Let us see now whether in terms of our example of physiognomies it is possible to explain the difference between perceptions having representative meaning and those having existential meaning. The difference in large part lies in the complexity of what is seen. When we see the parts of a face--nose, eyes, etc.--taken out of context,

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[15]Ibid., p. 97.

we see fairly simple figures. We have to reckon with no relationships except such extremely elementary ones as figure to ground. This is why those terms having to do with facial figures, for example, are capable of being fairly simply defined, most often by means of ostensive definition. A face on the other hand is infinitely more complex. We see not simply particular features, but features which have numerous relationships to each other and would not make up a face without those relationships, features which function as parts of a whole. The problem of defining wholes is infinitely more complex.

When we return to the example of my knowing what Susan looks like but being unable to tell, we find that I have several problems of articulation. In the first place I cannot be extremely exact about her particular features. That she has dark hair, a straight nose, greenish eyes, etc. is not nearly specific enough. Partially the problem is that I lack the vocabulary to describe her very specifically. Not only are there all sorts of noses--short, long, broad, flat, straight, crooked, humped, beaked--but there is more than one variety of straight nose, and the same goes for eyes, hair, and all other features. And while the problem can be somewhat alleviated by the police artist's charts, it cannot be entirely so, simply because of the great variety

possible within the boundaries of the general types on the charts. Still, that is a minor problem, applicable to all definitions which are not stipulative. There is a more serious problem here, which is that I have never sat down and taken a careful inventory of Susan's features. I have looked at her face, not at her nose. I have seen her nose only insofar as it functions as a part of her whole face. My awareness of it has been, in Polanyi's terms, subsidiary rather than focal. I might recognize it out of context, but then again, I might make a near miss, or worse.

But even if I had the kind of eye for detail that takes notice of the shapes of noses, and even if the vocabulary problem is overcome as well as it can be overcome, there remains another, the most serious, problem of articulation. That is the problem of articulating the arrangement of Susan's features. How do they all go together to make up her face? Her features are integrated, and this integration is well nigh impossible to articulate. Not only is a vocabulary virtually non-eixstent, but the development of one must presuppose the existence of capacities far more sophisticated than those required for the comprehension of an ordinary ostensive definition. It has already been pointed out that a whole is more than the sum of its parts, and that the integration of those parts into a whole is to some extent dependent on the

manner in which we perceive those parts. We can describe a face at all only to someone already capable of seeing features as integrated faces. We may be able to articulate some of the influences which have a bearing on the way in which we see what we see, but their very infinitude defies analysis. Furthermore, no matter how accurate and complete an analysis was given of the influences bearing on our manner of perceiving, that would be no help at all if what we had in mind was to tell someone else not merely how we saw, but how he could see that way too. The importance of this last point to the solution of Sibley's problems is such that it obviously requires further investigation. It will be taken up again in the forthcoming discussion of skills.

The identification of physiognomies is something people do all the time, but some of us are better at it than others. We all know people who never forget a face and other people who never remember. We would no doubt be justified in thinking of it as a skill, albeit a very prosaic one, common to almost everyone and used every day. And we also, after all, think of the exercise of taste as a skill. We should, therefore, be justified in adopting the working hypothesis that Polanyi's account of the salient characteristics of skills will be useful in explaining taste. Furthermore, part of the demonstration that Polanyi's account of perception enables us

to begin making sense of aesthetic perception will consist in explaining why we are unable to infer the existence of aesthetic features from the existence of non-aesthetic features. It will further suggest why the means adopted to point out aesthetic features to those so far unable to see them should be successful (or unsuccessful). With regard to those issues, the forthcoming account of the place of tacit knowledge in skilled performances should be helpful.

"I shall take as my clue for this investigation the well-known fact that the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules that are not known as such to the person following them."[16] It has long been recognized that the more highly skilled anyone is at any kind of performance, the less he has to refer to the rules as he goes along. It is not so well recognized but should be that most people learn skills with very little reference to any rules, the only exceptions seeming to be those skills for which necessary and sufficient rules can and do exist in a stipulated form, such as the ability to multiply. Even mathematics in general, often cited as an example of rule-oriented skill, will not really serve as an example, because as soon as one arrives at calculus the model ceases to apply. There are so many good examples around of

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[16]Ibid., p. 49.

skilled behavior which is not learned--let alone practiced--by constant reference to rules that it is very difficult to choose among them. But a quick sampling just to indicate the range covered might include riding a bicycle, using language, playing pianos, painting pictures, identifying faces, and shooting skeet. Some preliminary rule-oriented instruction may be given in such cases, but trial-and-error, example, and practice all count for much more.

What in the world, then, can possibly be meant by "the observance of rules" in the above quotation? It clearly is not conscious observance and adherence. What it seems to mean is that there are reasons why every skillful performance succeeds, or fails for that matter. There are things which have to be done or have to be taken into account before there can be a success of any degree. These reasons can be of any and every conceivable sort.

To return to the example we have been using, identifying a physiognomy would not be possible without the focal awareness of it as a whole, which in turn would not be possible without the subsidiary awareness of particular features. Such subsidiary awareness would constitute the observance of a necessary rule for identifying faces. For if we did not know the features and their arrangement, we would be incapable of

identifying any face. By the use of such perceptual clues as these, we are able to perceive a whole face. There may very well be other rules which must be met, but this one is primary and serves to illustrate the point. It should also serve to illustrate the point that not only do we not have to be conscious of the rules when we become skilled at a performance, we need not ever have known them.

Granted that we do not learn skills--or at least do not learn skills only--by following rules, does that mean that no set of rules can be formulated such that we can be told how to achieve a skillful performance? Polanyi wishes to uphold the strong claim that no complete set of rules can ever be formulated for a skilled performance. To some extent, his claim is based on the infinitude of possibilities bearing on any skilled performance. That might not be considered a serious problem if what were meant by a complete set of rules were only a listing of the actions one had to perform. (But imagine trying to tell someone how to do something as simple as tying a knot if you had to tell him not just what to do with the ends of the cord but how he had to move his fingers! We presuppose much more in giving instructions than we commonly realize.)

The strongest basis for his claim is not this infinitude of possibilities, nor is it the endless

variations of technique appertaining thereto. It is the fact that every skillful performance is an intentional performance, even the multiplication tables. Nothing done accidentally or unintentionally is a skillful performance, no matter how well it turns out. The person doing it would have to be aware of what it was he wanted to do. And the intention of a person undertaking a performance cannot be spelled out fully in terms of a list of the partiuclar activities which must be carried out before success can be achieved, no matter how complete that list. The aim of a skillful performance is also a whole which cannot be summed up by reciting its parts. Before you can tell someone how to do something, you must presuppose that he already knows what it is he is to do. Since the particular actions which must be performed will be performed in terms of that whole, our awareness of them will become subsidiary. Our knowledge of what must be done to make possible the desired achievement will be tacit. The problems of articulation already discussed will apply to it.

Another distinction remains to be made before Polanyi's account can be applied to Sibley's work in aesthetics. It can be rightly objected that the exercise of taste is a skill, but that taste itself is not a skill. While taste makes possible certain sorts of actions, there are other conditions which make possible

the same actions, which conditions neither Sibley nor I would want to call taste. This point will be expanded upon in chapter three. The distinction which needs to be made for that discussion is Polanyi's distinction between skill and connoisseurship.

The appreciable difference between skill and connoisseurship is that skill must include actions directed toward the achievement of a specific goal. Connoisseurship involves observation and appreciation without necessarily including any goal-oriented action. "In the exercise of skill and the practice of connoisseurship, the act of knowing is seen to involve . . . the pouring of ourselves into the subsidiary awareness of particulars, which in the performance of skills are instrumental to a skilful achievement, and which in the exercise of connoisseurship function as the elements of the observed comprehensive whole."[17] Otherwise, the rules of operation of tacit knowledge apply to skills and to connoisseurship alike. There are further similarities. Both skills and connoisseurship are capable of being developed and improved upon; neither just happens. Furthermore, some people are more skillful than others, just as some people are better connoisseurs. The point is simply that while some actions are associated with

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[17]Ibid., p. 64.

connoisseurship, it is possible to be skillful at those actions without being a connoisseur.

The following question naturally arises. If we do not learn to be skillful or to be connoisseurs by learning and following rules for successful performances, how do we learn? The model we need for how such things are learned is not a deductive model of rules laid out to be consciously followed, but the model of an apprenticeship. The apprentice learns not so much by thinking as by doing. He is taught not so much by rules as by example. What the apprentice is told by the master is not half so important as what he is shown. It may be argued that the apprentice is often told what to do, told in great detail. The point is that understanding what he is told will not make him skilled. The rules he must follow, the things he is told to do must reach a point where they become functional to a given end. They cannot remain abstractions, for their functionality is the most important thing about them. To reach this point, the apprentice must undergo much stumbling practice, much trial and error; much weary effort will be required of him before he has "acquired a feel" for his materials. Only when he acquires that feel will the master be satisfied with the apprentice.

This model of apprenticeship applies not just to skill but to connoisseurship. One cannot learn to be a

connoisseur just by reading books or attending lectures. Material from such sources, though important, is useless until it is assimilated. The facilities for observation, apprehension, appreciation, and evaluation involved must also be learned by practice, by trial and error. The discriminating perceptions of the connoisseur are not easily acquired.

Someone is bound to object here that all this means is that the rules have to be learned very well, such that once they are well learned, their use naturally becomes second-nature. But this is the point, that in the process of becoming skilled, the craftsman himself is altered, assimilating for himself a new context, from the standpoint of which the very materials with which he works are no longer the same but are seen and felt differently.

This is perhaps easier to make clear in the case of the connoisseur, for whom it is far less easy to make a superficial list of actions to be performed. What must be done to make a connoisseur is to alter his very perceptions, which it is possible to do by altering what I have been calling his manner of perceiving. How this happens will be gone into in some detail in discussing the connoisseur of the arts in chapter three.

When philosophers argue any question, they have at the ready the various rules of logic and of evidence.

They have but to discover in each other's arguments any of the formal or informal fallacies to destroy or seriously weaken those arguments. What they have forgotten is that even in this discipline, where there are fairly clear-cut and widely accepted rules for a successful performance, a long and arduous apprenticeship must be gone through before those rules become functional and can be followed with facility. Even the philosopher has to develop a feel for what he does.

It has now, I hope, become obvious that we have not one problem on our hands but two. To illustrate this point, let us return once more to the example of physiognomies. The problem was how to identify Susan Haley. The question may be asked from an academic standpoint: how is anyone able to recognize Susan? The answer to such a question will consist in a discussion of the processes of perception as they relate to identifying faces, listing the causes or conditions or influences that enable people to make identifications. The discussion of the perception of wholes given earlier is an example of the kind of answer required by this sort of question.

But there is another standpoint from which the question may be asked. How can I--or anyone else--become able to make such an identification? Let me take this up as the question of how I can tell anyone else how to

identify Susan. Let us suppose again that I am trying to give the police artist a description of Susan that will enable him to have a good chance of identifying her. That I cannot give him a perfect--i.e. logically sufficient--description has already been established. What needs to be emphasized is that I could give him no description at all if he did not already know the ways in which particular features go together to make up whole faces. Given that much in common in what I have been calling our manner of perceiving, we can at least attempt a composite of Susan, which, depending on other factors, may be more or less successful. To some extent, we are both capable of following the rules.

What is really important here is that no answer can be given to a questioner who is incapable of understanding it, who lacks any condition of understanding, be the necessary influences physical, psychological, or what have you. Imagine a physicist trying to explain to a Kalahari Bushman why he cannot shoot his arrow into the sun! It may be--indeed, often should be--possible to aid the questioner who lacks some condition. It may, for example, be possible to obtain an operation on someone congenitally blind. But no number of explanations of the processes of sight will be of any help to a blind man in the sense of enabling him to see.

CHAPTER 3

I wish to maintain that an account of perception such as that given in the last chapter provides us with a basis for making sense of aesthetic perception. This should enable us to give some answers to the questions about taste which were asked in the first chapter. To proceed, I must demonstrate the applicability of Polanyi's account to Sibley's work. I shall attempt to show its applicability by answering the following two questions: (1) What is the difference between aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception? (2) Why are we unable to infer from the existence of certain non-aesthetic features in a work of art that the work will also have certain aesthetic features? What is wrong with that model of explanation? Having dealt with those questions, I shall proceed to ask why we should be willing to accept the account of aesthetic perception offered here. Having done that, I shall finally consider whether Sibley himself would be likely to agree or differ with such an account.

What <u>is</u> the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception? Let me begin by summarizing the account which was offered in the last chapter of

what perception is in general, for it is in terms of that account that this question must be answered. The process of perception--all perception--is a process of gestalt formation. Numerous variations are possible within the process, different influences may be brought to bear, different degrees of complexity are possible, etc. But even our simplest perceptions are the result of a gestalt formation process. This is true even of the perception of what is generally regarded as the simplest of sensory experiences, that of color. It has already been pointed out that whenever anyone sees the celebrated patch of blue, he will see it on a quilt or between two clouds. Even the blue seen when the fingers are pressed firmly against closed eyelids for a few seconds has shape, a shifting, pulsing, indefinite shape to be sure, but shape nonetheless. Furthermore, that pulsing, indefinite, color-shape is seen as contrasting with its darker background.

Moving on from such extremely simple sensory experience, let us consider two very simple shapes, noting that even the simplest of shapes are perceived as gestalten. Consider a straight line. ——— When we see a line, we see it as contrasting with its background. This is the famous figure/ground distinction of gestalt psychology at its most basic. Now consider some dots. * ** ** It is clear that in addition to seeing

these dots contrasting with their background, we see them arranged, as having relationships to each other, the four on the right being grouped, the one on the left being singled out. In our process of perception, gestalten have been formed even in such simple cases as these.

Polanyi wants to describe perception as the perception of parts in terms of a whole. This is what a perceptual gestalt formation consists in, the perception of parts insofar as they function as parts of the whole. The process in which a perceptual gestalt is formed takes place through the assimilation of parts into a whole. It may not be immediately evident that there are parts to a straight line, until we consider that in our perception of a straight line (or anything else for that matter) we are in fact seeing both the figure and its background. In the case of the dots, of course, the objection is unlikely to arise that there are no parts, nor is it likely to arise in the case of other, more complex figures.

Let us now consider an example in which the gestalt formed is more complex, for instance, the human physiognomy. It has already been pointed out that when we see faces, we see the parts of those faces, such as eyes, nose, mouth, chin, forehead, etc., not as isolated entities but insofar as they are parts of a whole face.

In our perception of a face, a gestalt is formed of parts in a system of complex, interlocking relationships. We see features as arranged, as contrasting in color, etc., rather than in isolation. We can of course focus on features of a face rather than on the whole face, but we still perceive such a feature as a figure distinct from its background at the very least. Polanyi points out that in the process of perception, our awareness of the parts is subsidiary to our awareness of the whole.

But what we have summarized so far is true of all perception. What we need to find is that feature of Polanyi's account of perception which will provide a foundation for distinguishing aesthetic perception from non-aesthetic perception. We begin to see what this might be when we realize, apropos of our physiognomy example, that whether we see a face or its particular features depends not on the thing being seen, but on a contribution made to the process by the perceiver. There are numerous theories as to precisely what this contribution is, everything from some minute physiological change to childhood learning experiences, but determining the precise contribution need not concern us here.[18] The

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[18]I am always hesitant about offering any argument based on a possible world. But the following quotation from a science fiction story about visitors from outer space seems to me so suggestive that I would like to offer it for the benefit of anyone inclined to believe that we make no contribution to our perception of the human face

point is that the way we see the thing perceived shapes our perception of it. Though of course this contribution, which I have been calling our manner of perceiving, is not the sole determinant of the form the gestalt takes. There are limits on what we can see anything as.

The point of saying that the process of perception is a process of gestalt formation, and that our manner of perceiving determines the form of the gestalt, is that the difference between aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception will be found here, in the manner of perceiving. There must be an aesthetic manner of perceiving and a non-aesthetic manner of perceiving. So that it will be necessary to give an account of the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception in terms of an account of the aesthetic manner of perceiving. Shortly, I will attempt to give, if not a complete account, at least a sketch which indicates the lines along which such an account would have to proceed.

Let us first describe what we see when we have a non-aesthetic perception of some object such as a canvas

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or form: "But there it was: an impression of a tall, slender human-looking figure, oddly hard to get hold of visually, because of our expectations about the human form." James B. Girard, "Something's Coming," Fantasy and Science Fiction, May 1975. Anyone regarding this possible example as too fantastical is referred to the example provided us by phrenologists, physical anthropologists, and other experts, who, when focally aware of the features of a human face, see far more of them and in greater detail than any of us would.

with paint on it or a piece of carved wood, say Pablo Picasso's "Don Quixote," as opposed to what we see when we have an aesthetic perception of the same object. This is not intended to be stipulative, to define aesthetic perception as the perception of aesthetic features. It is merely to begin at the beginning, to describe the phenomenon which must be accounted for. As Sibley points out, if we had not already made a distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features, we could not begin to do aesthetics at all. If we were perceiving "Don Quixote" non-aesthetically, we would see black, angular line figures on an off-white background. Of the three most prominent figures, the largest occupies most of the right and middle foreground, a second smaller figure is located to its left, and the third prominent figure is in the upper left-hand corner. If, on the other hand, we were seeing "Don Quixote" aesthetically, we would see crudity, strength, and balanced tension, grotesquery and sombreness.

We have said the process of perception is one in which gestalt formation takes place. As we can see from the above description, the gestalten formed in non-aesthetic perception include colors, simple shapes, etc. The gestalten formed in aesthetic perception, on the other hand, include features not so easily classified, perhaps because, as we will see, they are for the most

part more complex. What we have to explain is why the latter gestalten are formed rather than the former.

In the case of non-aesthetic perception, we have already explained what is involved in the formation of such gestalten. The relationships which have been shown to figure in their formation are fairly simple, such as figure/ground, contrast, grouping, etc. They are all perfectly perceptible to anyone having ordinary eyesight. In fact, given ordinary eyesight, it is not possible not to see them, unless of course the perceiver closes his eyes, turns out the light, etc. The manner of perceiving which makes possible non-aesthetic perception, then, would seem to be whatever conditions make ordinary eyesight possible. Admittedly, this is a moot point, but the question of whether any conditions other than straightforward physiological conditions are involved here is one I prefer to avoid. I prefer to devote my energies to the problem of what makes aesthetic perception specifically aesthetic.

When "Don Quixote" is perceived aesthetically, the gestalten formed are those described above, crudity, balanced tension, etc. The formation of these gestalten takes place through the assimilation of parts into a whole. When we perceive an aesthetic gestalt, we perceive, not just parts, but parts functioning in terms of a whole, that is to say, parts having numerous complex

relationships to each other, which would not make up the wholes they do without those relationships. Our awareness of these parts is not focal, but is rather subsidiary to our awareness of the whole.

To begin with we may say that there are two kinds of parts which may be visually assimilated into an aesthetic whole through our processes of perception, namely, non-aesthetic features and other aesthetic features. There is no difference, however, in their function, for both are perceived as parts subsidiary to the whole. This functionality of the parts to the whole in the formation of an aesthetic gestalt is the most important thing about them, so, at the risk of seeming to recapitulate endlessly, I should point out once more that a whole is not simply the sum of its parts, for those parts, like the pieces of an orange or like eyes, nose, and mouth, must be arranged in certain ways. They must be shaped, structured, grouped, contrasted with other parts, etc. etc. etc. All the relationships possible between parts would constitute a vast listing indeed, one which, if all possible combinations of relationships were considered, would become well-nigh endless. The one function that all parts have in common in the process of perception is that of being perceived subsidiary to the whole. We cannot both be aware of the parts and at the same time be aware of the whole.

It is possible that someone might object to the claim that aesthetic features can function as parts of other aesthetic features on the grounds that this suggests that there may be more than one kind of aesthetic feature, which would place us in conflict with Sibley's two-fold distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features. But there is no reason for such a conflict to arise. We have already shown that non-aesthetic features are themselves wholes, though for the most part somewhat simpler in organization than aesthetic wholes. Except for this degree of complexity in sensory organization, there is no difference in the organizational principles involved. What makes something part of an aesthetic whole is not whether it is itself a non-aesthetic or an aesthetic feature, but rather the fact that it functions subsidiary to the whole. Furthermore, though most aesthetic features seem to be quite complex in their organization, it is not this complexity that renders them aesthetic. Indeed, one can think of many complex features which are not aesthetic. The ultimate basis for the distinction is our manner of perceiving. For it is that manner of perceiving which determines the way in which parts will be seen in relation to the whole, and therefore the character of the whole being perceived. It is an advantage of Polanyi's account of perception that he is able both to provide for degrees of complexity and

to relate aesthetic features to other aesthetic features, for surely we do make such associations.

Aesthetic perception, then, may be regarded as a process of gestalt formation in which the non-aesthetic features, or on a more complex level of organization other aesthetic features, of a work of art come to be perceived insofar as they function as parts of an aesthetic whole. This gestalt formation takes place thanks to our manner of perceiving the work of art. There is nothing radical about this claim. It amounts simply to saying that since we are able to perceive things in at least two different ways; since our perception is able to shape or arrange what we see in more than one way, we are able to see the same object, a canvas in the example offered, in more than one. Why we perceive the various gestalten we do depends on various influences, a term which, as I have already pointed out, includes a wide variety of possibilities, physiological, psychological, sociological, etc.

Of course the claim that the perception of aesthetic features is the perception of wholes of which non-aesthetic features are the parts in no way implies that all wholes of which non-aesthetic features are the parts will be aesthetic. It is quite possible even for a set of non-aesthetic features characteristically related to aesthetic features to be perceived in an other than aesthetic manner, leading to their being perceived

otherwise than as an aesthetic whole. It is also possible that there might be more than one aesthetic manner of perceiving, leaving open the possibility that the same set of parts could be perceived as more than one aesthetic whole. This however seems to me to be more likely to happen not in cases of the features we consider paradigm examples of features which are perceived, but rather with aesthetic features which rely at least partially on interpretation. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be ruled out easily, unless the aesthetic manner of perceiving were ultimately so characterized as to rule it out.

This brings us to the point where an attempt must be made to characterize the aesthetic manner of perceiving. Therefore, we must take into account those things which bear on our manner of perceiving, the way in which we see, or hear, or feel. But before I go on, let me point out again that by manner of perceiving neither Polanyi nor I has in mind a Kantian category, a single, fixed, necessary, specific faculty of the mind. It is a broader and a looser concept, which is just as well, since the aesthetic itself is a broad and loose concept in which Picasso's "Goat" bears little resemblance to Bach's Fugue in D Minor and neither bears much resemblance to Dostoievski's The Brothers Karamazov. I have already pointed out some of the sorts of influences there are on

how we see, physiology, expectations, associations, past experience, etc. Certainly these sorts of things should be expected to have some bearing on aesthetic perception. Without such physiological components as eyes in working order, for instance, we would be unable to see even the black stick figures of "Don Quixote," let alone its crudity. Nor can it be denied that experience and correlate learning have some bearing on aesthetic perception, for taste can be refined and expanded. But having considered these things, we still have to ask what there is about aesthetic perception which makes it specifically aesthetic, for these things are influences on all perception.

It is difficult to do more than point out that this question arises for the following reason. The question of what characterizes anything--be it an object, an emotion, a way of perceiving things, or just about anything else one cares to name--as specifically aesthetic is a question that has been considered in detail by every philosopher who has ever taken an interest in the field of aesthetics. In addition, many social scientists, artists, critics, etc. have made contributions to the discussion. To give anything like a comprehensive list of the possibilities is not within the scope of this thesis. To argue conclusively for or against any

of them on the grounds of this theory of perception would be a thesis in itself.

One strength of this account of perception, however, is the wide scope which it offers for such speculation. For if anything has been made clear in the history of aesthetics, it is that the characterizations of the aesthetic are multitudinous, including everything from the causal effects of aesthetic objects through the influences of culture to characteristically aesthetic emotions, any one of which could certainly influence how we see. If only to demonstrate the scope of this theory, it behooves me to give some account of what makes aesthetic perception aesthetic. But before I begin, let me just mention one way in which the account I am about to offer might be misunderstood. For centuries aestheticians seem to have proceeded with their investigations in the firm belief, consciously or unconsciously held, that taste, or aesthetic perception, is a separate entity; that it is related, if at all, only very distantly to our ordinary perceptions of things. Perhaps because of this, or vice versa, the realm of the aesthetic was too often considered to be, or at least discussed as if it somehow were, a facet of human life virtually isolated from our ordinary human concerns and perceptions by wide and clearly demarcated boundaries. While it must surely be possible to demarcate the aesthetic area of our lives

and aesthetic perception from other areas of our lives and from what we consider to be more ordinary perception if the term aesthetic is to make any sense at all, the attempt to do so has been too vigorous. A distinction need not be drastic to be a viable distinction. This point will be gone into in greater detail later on. Some lines along which such a discussion will have to proceed have been suggested in the preceding chapters.

I intend now to summarize two characterizations of aesthetic experience which have had some historical importance with a view to demonstrating by example what sorts of influences on our manner of perceiving might constitute conditions for the aesthetic manner of perceiving. There are at least two ways in which the aesthetic experience has commonly been characterized. First, it has been characterized primarily in terms of the object which, by being perceived, evokes the aesthetic experience. The example offered of this characterization is Clive Bell's theory of significant form. Second, the aesthetic has been characterized in terms of some mental state in which the observer of an object must be in order to perceive the object aesthetically. The example offered of this characterization is Edward Bullough's theory of psychical distance. This is not to suggest, by the way, that neither Bell nor Bullough recognized the existence of the other side of the coin;

Bell was interested in aesthetic emotion and Bullough in the greater or lesser likelihood that an object would be viewed from the standpoint of psychical distance. They differed in their emphasis. Besides these two historically significant accounts, I shall consider the characterization offered by Michael Polanyi in his article "What Is a Painting?"

Let us consider first that obvious factor, the aesthetic object itself. There is great variety among aesthetic objects. To us, the obvious examples are paint on canvas, carved stones, print on paper, etc.; that is to say, paintings and sculpture and books. And buildings and drama and music and the dance. This list must be kept loose, for some people would want to include among aesthetic objects flower arrangements or bullfights, driftwood or sunsets. Yet we all realize that some objects are more likely to be perceived aesthetically than others in spite of the looseness of the list. Perhaps a fruitful question might be, why these particular objects? Why "Don Quixote" hanging over my desk instead of the thermos bottle on it?

Clive Bell begins with the assumption "that there is a particular kind of emotion provoked by works of visual art, and that this emotion is provoked by every kind of visual art . . . is not disputed, I think, by

anyone capable of feeling it."[19] He goes on to ask, "What quality is shared by all objects that provoke our esthetic emotions?"[20] He answers this question by saying that "only one answer seems possible--significant form. In each, lines and colors combined in a particular way, certain forms and relations of forms, stir our esthetic emotions."[21] Beyond this, Bell maintains that the objects of this aesthetic emotion are almost never objects of the natural world. He considers the sense in which people generally ascribe aesthetic predicates to natural objects to be inappropriate, or at least unaesthetic, particularly the aesthetic predicate "beautiful." For the emotion with which he is concerned is one of "austere and thrilling raptures. . . ."[22]

There are many directions from which objections to this theory may come, but perhaps one of the most telling is that everything we see has lines and colors, forms and relations, in terms of which we see it. This is as true of all vision as it is of aesthetic vision. Perhaps we may obtain a little enlightenment through its

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[19]Clive Bell, "Significant Form," in A Modern Book of Esthetics, ed. Melvin Rader (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938), p. 246.

[20]Ibid., p. 247.

[21]Ibid.

[22]Ibid., p. 257.

being significant form, "an intense and peculiar significance . . . unrelated to the significance of life."[23] Of course, one is obliged to wonder just what this peculiar significance might be. About this Bell says, "(A)n object considered as an end in itself moves us more profoundly (i.e. has greater significance) than the same object considered as a means to practical ends or as a thing related to human interests. . . ."[24] It is its "pure form," whatever that might be, in which Bell is interested. But if we are to take as our criterion the perception of an object as "an end in itself" and mean by it that we see it from the standpoint of none of our particular interests, we will find ourselves in difficulties. For it is perfectly possible that I might notice, for example, that a thing was red in a casual way, not regarding it as a means to any particular interest that I might have. But such casual observations hardly constitute aesthetic expereinces. Nor do they achieve anything like the emotional heights Bell thinks must accompany aesthetic experience.

More will be said both about aesthetic emotion and about the difference between the aesthetic and the practical as I go on. But now let us consider Polanyi's

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[23]Ibid., p. 253.

[24]Ibid., p. 262.

characterization of the aesthetic object, both as another way in which the aesthetic object might influence our perception of it to become aesthetic and as a natural bridge to Bullough. Polanyi, having maintained that paintings are gestalt wholes, goes on to maintain that there is something interesting about gestalt formation in paintings.

> The union is not a fusion of complementary parts to a whole, but a fusion of contradictory features. The flatness of a canvas is combined with perspectival depth, which is the very opposite of flatness.[25]

He goes on to say about the representative arts in general, that we find that a subject is represented "within an artificial framework which contradicts its representative aspects."[26] Thanks to these factors we may say that the arts have a trans-natural nature, such that "The arts do not exhibit things which could be there and yet are not there; they exhibit things of a kind that cannot exist, either in nature or among men."[27] Another example provided of the phenomenon of artificial framework is poetry, in which the ordinary descriptive content is combined with meter, rhyme, expressive sounds, metaphor, etc., all of which function as subsidiaries of

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[25]Michael Polanyi, "What Is a Painting?", The American Scholar, 1970, p. 662.

[26]Ibid., p. 664.

[27]Ibid., p. 667.

the whole poem. There is also the example of drama, in which various actions are carefully simulated, yet that simulation is not allowed to reach a point at which it will actually deceive. We are not, after all, deceived when Hamlet kills Polonius into beliefs and reactions consistent with witnessing an actual murder. The range of simulation is restricted in part by the artificial apparatus of stage craft. It should also be noted that some restraint on the simulation is provided by the subsidiary realization of the audience members that they are in fact attending a play. This subsidiary realization enables the audience to view the murder of Polonius with--hopefully--a different emotional attitude to that with which they would view the murder of the local gas-station attendant during a robbery.

Of course it doesn't always work quite that way. There is, for example, the delightful tale of a remote and isolated Berber tribe confronted with their first movie. When the villain flung the heroine over his saddle and galloped away, the tribesmen leaped to their feet as one man, drew their scimitars, and dashed through the screen in hot pursuit. (Not for nothing are movies the most realistic of the representative arts. Or are they the most illusory?)

Few persons who have worked in aesthetics would deny that one characteristic of the aesthetic manner of

perceiving is a capacity for emotion. We ordinarily expect some sort of emotional impact to be involved in an encounter with an aesthetic object, such that we are angered or uplifted, saddened or made jubilant, etc. But as Polanyi, not to mention many another philosopher notes, there is a difference between aesthetic emotions and emotions of other kinds. Unlike the Berbers, we do not rise to pursue the villain. And in the unlikely event that we leap onto the stage to turn Hamlet over to the authorities--or help him get away, depending on our sympathies--it may seriously be questioned whether we are any longer acting in an aesthetic manner. This attitude is commonly understood by philosophers to be opposed to what might be called a practical or everyday attitude, which might understandably motivate us to take some practical action.

But we have gone now from speaking of emotions to speaking of attitudes, which is probably just as well. In our discussion of Clive Bell's position, it was pointed out that he postulates the existence of a particular aesthetic emotion, the presence of which is evoked in those capable of feeling it by significant form. But there are problems with this view. For one thing, there are numerous possible aesthetic emotions. We may be uplifted or made jubilant, which might correspond to Bell's austere and icy heights. But it does not seem to

be obviously mistaken to say that we may be said to be angered, or saddened, or even dusgusted, and still be said to be aesthetically moved. But perhaps even more importantly, "even if the postulated emotion could be identified, its arousal in the recipient would not provide the necessary criterion of relevance. The reason for this is that an aesthetic experience does not seem to me inevitably an emotional one."[28] It is perfectly conceivable, for example, that two persons having an argument about whether a painting was delicate or insipid could defer to the authority of a passing expert, who could take a quick look at the painting, pronounce it delicate or insipid, and hurry on his way without feeling any corresponding aesthetic emotion. Nevertheless, the expert would have had an aesthetic experience--perhaps aesthetic experience at its most basic--in thus perceiving the painting's aesthetic feature. It does not seem, then, that emotional capacity is a necessary prerequisite for aesthetic perception in individual cases (though it is worth pointing out that it may still be, and in some sense I think still is, relevant to the original development of the capacity here so casually exercised). Is there any characteristic attitude which might apply to all these situations?

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[28]E. M. Bartlett, "The Determination of the Aesthetic Minimum," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, 1934-1935, p. 121.

One interesting account which attempts to characterize the attitude common to aesthetic experience in these varying situations, one which gave rise to much subsequent speculation, is Edward Bullough's article on psychical distance. He illustrates the meaning of the term "psychical distance" by a striking illustration of a fog at sea. A fog at sea, as he points out, is not only physically annoying and dangerous, but by virtue of its obscurity and isolation productive of strained anxiety, of feelings of invisible dangers lurking just beyond the range of human perception. It is nevertheless possible to enjoy, in one sense of the term, such a fog. "Direct the attention to the features 'objectively' constituting the phenomenon--the veil surrounding you with an opaqueness as of transparent milk, blurring the outline of things and distorting their shapes into weird grotesqueness . . . and above all, the strange solitude and remoteness from the world, as it can be found only on the highest mountain tops; and the experience may acquire, in its uncanny mingling of repose and terror, a flavor of such concentrated poignancy and delight as to contrast sharply with the blind and distempered anxiety of its other aspects."[29] He compares this contrast to

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[29]Edward Bullough, "Psychical Distance as a Factor in Art and an Esthetic Principle," British Journal of Psychology, 1913. Reprinted in A Modern Book of Esthetics, pp. 316-17.

the impression we sometimes experience when "we watch the consummation of some impending catastrophe with the marveling unconcern of a mere spectator."[30] This is due, he goes on to say, to the insertion of what he calls distance.

> This Distance appears to lie between our own self and its affections, using the latter term in its broadest sense as anything which affects our being, bodily or spiritually, e.g. as sensation, perception, emotional state or idea. Usually, though not always, it amounts to the same thing to say that the Distance lies between our own self and such objects as are the sources or vehicles of such affections.[31]

Distance, then, abstracts from the experience its practical character, removes it from the impact of other concerns.

To illustrate how this might work, let us consider an example of the art form which, perhaps more than any other, often is not aesthetically perceived because many of its spectators fail to maintain this "distance." This art form is the bullfight. Let us suppose that a bullfight is viewed by someone having the fairly ordinary and quite understandable attitude towards physical danger that it is something which sensible persons avoid rather than court. Such a person might equally have the attitude that danger is something which could be courted or watched only by someone in

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[30] Ibid., p. 317.

[31] Ibid.

search of a cheap thrill. Needless to say, if such a spectator is not able to distance himself from such an attitude temporarily, he will hardly be likely to note the grace of a spectable in which a foolishly brave man attempts to prevent a large, very dangerous, wild animal from goring him to death by waving a piece of red cloth at it. Another spectator might be very fond of animals, or a least regard any not-strictly-necessary pain inflicted on them as an unnecessary evil. Such a spectator, if he is unable to or simply refuses to distance himself from this attitude, will observe the spectacle in a state of moral outrage, and, shocked by the injured horses and sure that the bull is in torment, will be not very likely--will be perhaps even rendered forever incapable--to see in the spectacle the almost sinister delicacy of the bullfighter or the nobility (in the technical aesthetic sense of that term) of the Toro Bravo. For people like this, as Ernest Hemingway put it in Death in the Afternoon, "all explanation will be rendered meaningless beside the obvious moral wrongness of the bullfight."[32] We may contrast these spectators with the bullfight aficianado, "one who has this sense of tragedy and ritual of the fight so that the minor aspects are not important except as they relate to the

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[32]Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 10.

whole."[33] It is worth noting that a bullfight aficianado may well have, outside the arena, the attitudes described as detrimental to those spectators unable to leave them at the arena gate. Certainly, the aficianado need not be expected to hold the converse of those attitudes, to beat his dogs and idolize Evel Knievel. Rather, his attitude can be at least minimally defined as one of not allowing other concerns to interfere with his perceiving the bullfight aesthetically. Perhaps the absence, or at least the temporary suspension, of other concerns is one thing which enables us to form aesthetic gestalten.

But even if this is a factor in aesthetic gestalt formation, and I think it is, it still only partially enables us to explain how we are able to form such gestalten. To reiterate a point already made, the non-aesthetic, non-interpretive description of an aesthetic object need not involve any particularly personal attitude either. I need not have any attitude at all to note that something is red or has three sides. But my making such an observation idly or casually would certainly not make it an aesthetic observation. Bullough might reply here that while psychical distance is not personal, we would not want to call it impersonal either. And admittedly, idle or casual perception does not seem

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[33]Ibid., p. 9.

to be synonymous with aesthetic perception. Bullough himself compares this personal/impersonal attitude of distance to the "marveling unconcern of a mere spectator"[34] watching an impending disaster unfold. While we might be willing to admit that there are impersonal emotions, it is difficult to say just how we would differentiate them from the emotions of a spectator watching the six o'clock news, which is, to my mind, rather a dubious candidate for an aesthetic experience.

The objection here is directed toward the object, so perhaps we should again try leaving the aesthetic attitude and going back to the aesthetic object. We might want to resort to another attempt to characterize the object, considering whether the personal/impersonal attitude which in at least some instances characterizes aesthetic perception is somehow made possible by some feature of the aesthetic object. We might consider, for example, the trans-natural nature of the aesthetic object posited by Polanyi. But this, while it might be helpful, again presents us with problems. For one thing, it renders all photographs aesthetic objects by virtue of their combining flatness with perspectival depth, a result I think it questionable, at least, to allow. Furthermore, this trans-natural nature of the arts may

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[34]Bullough, "Psychical Distance," p. 317.

exclude from the realm of the aesthetic at least one recognized category of aesthetic objects, namely, tromp l'oeil paintings, one feature of which is that they could be, and yet are not, there. Such exclusions are moot at best.

What has been accomplished by this rather cavalier and incomplete treatment of the views of Bell, Polanyi, and Bullough? Only to see that none of these characterizations will stand alone in characterizing aesthetic perception. It is a point which has been made before and will no doubt be made again in the history of aesthetics that no single characterization of the aesthetic ever seems able to stand alone. This has been said not only of characterizations similar to these in approach (e.g. Roger Fry, John Dewey, etc.), but has been shown to apply to characterizations in terms of culture, education, psychology, the Nature of the Beautiful, imagination, etc., etc., ad infinitum, ad nauseum. But perhaps what is most interesting about this account is what it has not shown. While no one would want to say that either Bell, Polanyi, or Bullough is completely correct--whether because the characterizahe offers does not fit all aesthetic situations, or whether while it does seem to fit aesthetic situations, it also seems to fit situations not so obviously aesthetic--no one would want to say that Bell, Polanyi,

and Bullough are completely wrong either. Any of the factors they cite in their characterizations of the aesthetic could well be influences on our manner of perceiving which could enable us to form aesthetic gestalten.

We have reached here a point where we may profitably ask whether much which has been done in the history of aesthetics has been less successful than it might have been because it has proceeded from certain mistaken assumptions. A similar question has been made famous, of course, by William E. Kennick's well-known paper, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?"[35] But while the substance of his criticism of aesthetics is substantially linguistic, mine is epistemological.[36]

What is wrong with such theories as those of Bell and Bullough is that they are looking for some one mark or set of marks which will characterize all instances of the aesthetic and only instances of the aesthetic. Of late a trend has developed among aestheticians to search instead "for what, to torture a phrase of Wittgenstein's, we can call 'family resemblances.'"[37] Instead of

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[35]William W. Kennick, "Does Traditional Aesthetics Rest on a Mistake?", Mind, 1958.

[36]This is not, of course, to say whether these differing approaches are compatible, a question I am certainly not obliged to raise here.

[37]Kennick, "Traditional Aesthetics," p. 323.

searching for necessary and sufficient criteria for characterizing the aesthetic, they prefer to make lists of possible criteria which constitute "family resemblances," and consider that partial adherence to these criteria is sufficient to establish something as aesthetic. The objection can still be raised against the "family resemblances" which was raised against necessary criteria, that while each resemblance does seem to fit aesthetic situations, they also seem to fit situations not so obviously aesthetic. But while this is true of individual resemblances, it is perhaps not so telling against the aggregate. A situation, an object, or a perception to which a great many common characterizations of the aesthetic apply is not one the aesthetic nature of which we are likely to question. The problem with this approach is that it leaves the borderline between aesthetic and non-aesthetic as fuzzy as it ever was. At least those aestheticians who searched for a necessary and sufficient criterion or set of criteria had the advantage of knowing that if ever their search was successful, they would have a sharp boundary of demarcation. That the fuzziness of the family resemblance boundary bothers some aestheticians at least who have taken that approach is shown by the phenomenon of those practitioners of the approach who will list, for example, seven resemblance criteria, and who will then

assert that the presence of any five of these criteria assures that whatever is under consideration is aesthetic. The temptation is almost irresistable to ask at this point whether anything meeting four of those criteria is four-fifths aesthetic, anything meeting three, three-fifths aesthetic, and so on. The real question, to my mind, is whether we really need to worry about being left with a wide, fuzzy borderline, and if not, why not.

I think I am in little danger of being contradicted when I say that one of the most basic of all aesthetic situations is aesthetic perception, what occurs when someone observes an aesthetic object and perceives its aesthetic features, looks at a painting, for example, and sees its delicacy, or looks at a young tree and sees its grace. As I pointed out earlier in this chapter, this process is one in which a gestalt formation takes place, in which the object's subsidiary features are arranged by the perceiver into an aesthetic whole, i.e. an aesthetic feature. The capacity to form such a gestalt is the result of a variety of influences, educational, psychological, etc. But we should not forget that all perception is a process of gestalt formation made possible by the capacity of the perceiver, and also the result of a variety of influences. While physiological influences are most important in non-aesthetic

perception, there are other factors which can and do influence the formation process. Sibley himself, in distinguishing aesthetic features from non-aesthetic features, wisely relies on the use of examples. It is interesting to note, too, that the lists he gives of aesthetic features and non-aesthetic features are not given in terms of a strict, two-part distinction. Aesthetic features include features which are always aesthetic, features which are sometimes aesthetic, and features which are rarely aesthetic. Given the right context, even a non-aesthetic feature can be aesthetic.

Let me ask again a question I asked to begin this discussion. What makes aesthetic perception aesthetic? I hope it is beginning to become clear that there is a sense in which this question can be very misleading. It is the same sense in which the question "What is the difference between aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception?" would be understood to be asking for two perceptions instead of two variations on a single theme. Perhaps it would be less misleading in the long run to ask not what makes <u>aesthetic</u> perception aesthetic, but simply what makes <u>perception</u> aesthetic.

To be sure, there are differences between aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception. Indeed, there must be differences if the term "aesthetic" is to have any meaning at all. They may even be quite

substantial differences. But they are not substantial in the sense that aesthetic perception and non-aesthetic perception are members of two different species. Both are gestalt formation processes, and both are made possible by the capacities of the perceiver, which capacities may be affected by a variety of influences. For this reason, far from being dismayed that the boundary lines between aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception are broad and fuzzy, we should realize that fuzzy boundaries are precisely what we should have expected. When we realize that the distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception is blurred not because we have not yet looked hard enough to see the line of demarcation, but because aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception shade as naturally into each other as variations shade into their theme, we will no longer think it necessary to search for such a hard and fast distinction. Fuzzy boundaries, understood in this sense, make the distinctions between aesthetic and non-aesthetic not harder to draw, but easier. If we are not, after realizing this, content with such characterizations of the aesthetic as we already have which might serve as influences on the aesthetic manner of perceiving, it should be a discontent which comes not from our desire to change the characterization of the aesthetic but from a desire to enrich our concept of it. From that point of view, the possibilities

for speculation are broad indeed. As Wittgenstein said about aesthetic appreciation,

> It is not only difficult to describe what appreciation consists in, but impossible. To describe what it consists in, we would have to describe the whole environment.[38]

We come now to the second question with which this chapter is concerned. Why are we unable to infer from the existence of certain non-aesthetic features of a work of art that the work will also have certain aesthetic features? What is wrong with that model of explanation? Sibley has already given us the beginnings of an answer by pointing out that taste is the ability to perceive the aesthetic features of a work of art. We do not infer that "Don Quixote" is crude or balanced; we see that it is. And while to a certain extent it is possible to tell someone how to see something--Sibley gives several examples of such instructions, for which see pages 15-16--it is never possible to do so in any logically sufficient manner. We may once again make use of one of Polanyi's phrases and say that while we know how to see aesthetic features ourselves, we know more than we can tell. Why is this the case?

While the vast majority of philosophers, Sibley included, admit that there is a relationship between

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[38]Ludwig Wittgenstein, Lectures and Conversations (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), p. 7.

aesthetic and non-aesthetic features, it is extremely difficult to articulate this relationship. Let us consider the situation. Given our explanation of aesthetic perception, whenever anyone sees an aesthetic feature, he is able to see the related non-aesthetic features only insofar as they function as parts of the perceived aesthetic whole. His awareness of those features is subsidiary rather than focal. He can no more see both the aesthetic feature and the related non-aesthetic features at the same time as he can see both the duck and the rabbit of the duck/rabbit at the same time. This alone presents a considerable obstacle to any successful elucidation of the exact relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features, for it makes it impossible to take any careful inventory of the non-aesthetic features while perceiving the related aesthetic feature.

There is a further difficulty of articulation here. To describe the relationship of non-aesthetic features to aesthetic features, we are forced to describe exactly that--relationship. And relationships, functions, arrangement, integration, etc. can often be extremely difficult to describe. Even finding the vocabulary to successfully describe such things would present most of us with a thorny problem indeed. More important, however, is a point already made, that our perception

depends in large part on what I have been calling our manner of perceiving. The numerous influences which enable us to perceive things in the ways we do, in this case aesthetically, must be present to at least some extent before we will ourselves be able to see the relationships, functions, etc. which have been articulated to us. And to reach this point is presumably the aim of any attempt to articulate the relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features.

The problem of telling someone how to see aesthetically is the problem of telling someone how to become a connoisseur, similar in many respects to telling someone how to perform skillfully. At this juncture it will probably be helpful to give a description of an art connoisseur, considering what problems are involved in the process of giving that description.

As has already been pointed out, the main difference between skill and connoisseurship is that skill must include action oriented toward a particular goal, while connoisseurship need include no such actions but may consist simply in a capacity to observe rather than to do. However, there are skills which are closely related to connoisseurship in the arts, which are even founded upon it, such that we must not insist too vehemently on this distinction between them. Certainly we would expect practitioners of the arts to be

connoisseurs of the arts though not vice versa. On the other hand, there are skills we expect the connoisseur to have, such that we might expect him of having no genuine appreciation if he failed entirely in such skills. The connoisseur buys good records or paintings, attends good concerts or art shows, etc. When he becomes an expert at such selection and is in addition good at showing why these are good (insofar as that is possible) to those less accomplished than himself, we have the specialized case of the art critic, the point at which connoisseurship becomes most nearly skill.

But while these are skilled achievements, they are properly based on the capacity to be a connoisseur. That capacity is not based on them. It would be quite possible for someone who read the right critics and imitated the right people to amass quite an array of good records or paintings, to attend the best concerts or art shows, without being a genuine connoisseur. The skilled mimic of connoisseurs would not know for himself whether a painting or symphony was good or not. He would know only that other people knew. The ability to act in ways in which connoisseurs are expected to act would not make him a connoisseur.

What, then, is characteristic of the genuine connoisseur? What is he able to do which the mimic cannot do? Sibley would want to say that his most basic

characteristic, prior to all others, is the ability to perceive the aesthetic features of works of art. He can hear rhythmic balance or lack of it, can differentiate delicacy from insipidity and boldness from garishness, and much, much more. The connoisseur has taste. He is capable of aesthetic perception. It might be pointed out here that there is more to it than that. The connoisseur also makes value judgments, for example, but this is secondary. The connoisseur presumably should know what aesthetic features are good or bad in a given situation. But before he can make value judgments in a given situation, he must be able to perceive the aesthetic features of a work of art.

The connoisseur knows how to see aesthetic features. But faced with a situation of trying to show someone else how to see them, he faces serious problems. This is not to say that there are not things he can do, or that he cannot hope for success. There are indeed many things he can do, and he will probably be successful more times than not. But this success will not come about because the person he is trying to help has managed to make an inference from non-aesthetic to aesthetic features. The connoisseur must be to the man who cannot yet see an aesthetic feature as a master to an apprentice. His aim must be quite literally <u>to show</u> the apprentice aesthetic features.

It has already been pointed out that a whole is more than the sum of its parts, because, at the very least, those parts must be arranged in certain ways. At least part of the arrangement, function, integration, etc. of those parts is due not to the parts themselves but to the way in which we see them. This makes it clear that the apprentice cannot simply be told what the relevant parts are. Even telling how those parts were arranged, assuming that were possible, would not be enough, for he would have to be told how those parts are arranged, not in isolation, but insofar as they participate in the whole. Needless to say, this would be difficult to do when the whole is precisely what cannot be seen. Obviously, what must happen is that the apprentice must have his manner of perceiving altered to the point where his perception will be able to form the gestalt.

Before the connoisseur's task as the apprentice's master begins to sound too complex, onerous, or even esoteric, however, let me point out that--fortunately for him--he will not be operating in a vacuum. To begin with, he can take physiology for granted. No one would be so foolish as to try to teach a blind man to see in any but a purely metaphorical sense. While this point may seem almost ludicrously trivial to some, I think it not unimportant. After all, the physical capacity for sight

is necessary though not sufficient for all visual aesthetic perception, and it is quite possible that the ability to focus, for example, may be of extreme importance in visual gestalt formation. Furthermore, master and apprentice will have a language in common, which ensures that they will have much in common in the ways in which they see things. Shared language ensures a great deal of shared experience and learning, which is bound to affect one's manner of perceiving. The example in chapter 2 of trying to tell a police artist what Susan Haley looked like was given with the emphasis that before I could tell him this, he would have to have at least some idea of how features go together to make up faces. But of course he has a very good idea of how features go together to make up faces! The connoisseur's apprentice may also be expected to have a good idea of how parts go together to make up wholes. He can scarcely have avoided many of the influences on our manner of perceiving which enable us to see things aesthetically. To show how this would work out in practice, let us take a look at some of the things Sibley thinks a connoisseur in a teaching situation would try to do.

Sibley begins by pointing out that it may do the trick simply to point out the relevant non-aesthetic features of the work of art under observation. And if the apprentice has the necessary capacity for perceiving

aesthetically, it may very well be that all that needs to be done is to draw his attention to those features. Perception, it will be remembered, is the comprehension of clues in terms of a whole. Pointing out the clues is a good place to start. If the apprentice then tries to see them as subsidiary to an aesthetic whole (remember that he does not need to know that this is what he is doing to do it; we need not know the rules to be able to follow them), he may well succeed. Should the pointing out of the non-aesthetic features not be enough, the master can always resort to pointing out characteristic asssociations between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features in the hopes of jogging the apprentice's way of looking at those non-aesthetic features. If he is used to assimilating parts to their assimilated wholes--which of course he is!--it is not unlikely that this will enable him to reach the point where he will be able to see the aesthetic features for himself.

Should tactics such as the above not work out, what does Sibley suggest as a further approach? The master may well make use of similes. There are numerous ways in which this might be done. For example, the master might point out to the apprentice that the relationship of pale, soft colors to delicacy is much like the relationship of new young grass and flowers to early spring weather. Assuming that the simile is at all

accurate, this clue to what the relationship is like may enable the apprentice to arrange his perceptions of pale, soft colors in some similar relationships, thereby arriving eventually at the necessary gestalt. On the other hand, the master might point out that an aesthetic feature is like something else, that boldness, for example, is like a bright, hot day in July. If the apprentice has some idea what the whole is like of which the non-aesthetic features are parts, the process of arranging those parts functional to that whole will be greatly simplified. There are many more ways in which the use of similes by the master can be helpful to the apprentice, but these two serve to illustrate the point. Similarly useful are metaphors, comparisons and contrasts, anecdotes, etc.

In addition to the ways already mentioned, anecdotes could well be helpful in the following way. It has already been pointed out that emotions, moods, etc. are important influences on whether we see things aesthetically or non-aesthetically. Anecdotes might well be able to induce in the apprentice the aesthetic manner of perceiving, putting him, so to speak, in a receptive frame of mind.

Sibley also suggests that the actions of the master may serve to show the apprentice aesthetic features. Given the model of apprenticeship already

discussed, we should scarcely find this surprising. Features, expressions, tones of voice could any or all successfully call the apprentice's attention to the right clues in the right way.

Let us consider again the fact that we are not operating in a vacuum. It is a rare day indeed when we meet a man who is aesthetically totally blind, or deaf, or otherwise insensitive. We very seldom encounter anyone who sees aesthetic qualities in nothing. In the unlikely event, however, that the master does encounter an apprentice who is aesthetically blind, he is still not helpless. There are many things he can do to sensitize him. He can expose the apprentice to as many aesthetic objects as possible, use such means of acculturation as making him read as much and in as much variety as possible, cause him to associate with as many sensitive people as possible, try by every means imaginable to bring out whatever powers of imagination the apprentice has. It may be that it is possible to be aesthetically blind, to have no aesthetic perceptions, ever, forever and irremediably lacking some necessary facet or facets of the aesthetic manner of perceiving. In such a case, the master will be helpless. But equally helpless will be all the inferences ever made from non-aesthetic to aesthetic features.

To sum up, the model of making inferences does not provide us with an adequate account of perception, period. So surely we should not expect it to provide us with an adequate account of aesthetic perception! To understand how we come to be able to perceive aesthetic features, we must understand that the process of perception is one in which gestalt formation takes place. When we understand this, and when we understand that a gestalt whole cannot be inferred from a list of its parts, we will no longer attempt to fit aesthetic perception into a model of making inferences. Instead we will adopt a model such as the apprenticeship model, which accounts for aesthetic perception in terms of our manner of perceiving aesthetic wholes.

Let us now turn to the next question. Why should we accept the account of aesthetic perception offered here? Let me begin the discussion by asking whether we are justified in maintaining that the perception of aesthetic features is the perception of wholes. Obviously, if we accept that aesthetic perception is perception, and we accept that perception is the perception of wholes, then we are justified in maintaining that aesthetic perception is the perception of wholes. Therefore, insofar as the foregoing account is coherent and well-argued, it is its own justification. But aside from that, and aside from other reasons offered in the

course of the text which will be summed up later, what reason have we for accepting the account?

If we know any one thing about aesthetic features, if any one thing about them could be said to be obvious, it is that they are to some extent dependent for their existence on non-aesthetic features. Aesthetic features never occur in isolation from non-aesthetic features. This, of course, would not have to amount to much more than saying that we have to perceive something to perceive something as having aesthetic features. But in addition to this, we make numerous characteristic associations between specific non-aesthetic features and specific aesthetic features. Paintings done in pale, soft colors, for example, we might reasonably expect to have the feature of delicacy. On the other hand, paintings with large patches of very bright or dark colors we might reasonably expect not to have delicacy. (Of course we could be wrong in either case, and we would not know for sure until we saw it.) This argues that the dependency between non-aesthetic features and aesthetic features is a fairly strong one. Yet we know that it is not a logical dependency. How, then, do we explain it? If we maintain that aesthetic features are emergent features, this phenomenon becomes perfectly explicable.

It is becoming fairly widely accepted among aestheticians to maintain that aesthetic features are

emergent features. Sibley himself thinks that they are. And emergent feature, of course, is a term practically synonymous with gestalt. If aesthetic features are best understood as emergent features or gestalten, we would expect them to behave, so to speak, in certain ways. If they can be shown to behave in those ways, we have a powerful argument for accepting an account of aesthetic perception construed as the perception of gestalten.

One thing we can say about gestalten is that we do not see them gradually. We do not see one part of a gestalt, then another, then perhaps another, and then, having added up the pieces,--at last!--the feature itself! We see it whole, or not at all. Of course we can sometimes look at the particular features commonly associated with a gestalt one at a time, but this is not the same thing as finding bits and pieces of that feature. This can be said of aesthetic features. One does not perceive one piece of delicacy, then another, then delicacy itself. Nor does one see a piece of balance here and another piece of balance there, and then--perhaps stepping back a few paces--see balance. Though of course one can see one thing which is balanced here and another thing which is balanced there, this is not the same as seeing pieces of balance. If someone were ever to ask us whether this were a piece of balance over here, we would hasten to assure the poor fellow that he hadn't got the right

approach at all. So true is it that we do not perceive aesthetic features gradually, that the appearance of such a feature not perceived before may even seem quite sudden. We often, if I may indulge myself in a moment of metaphor, speak of such a just-this-instant-perceived aesthetic feature as "springing out at me," or as "standing up and slapping me in the face."

Another characteristic of gestalten is that we cannot perceive the parts focally and at the same time perceive the whole. If we perceive a whole, we are able to perceive the parts only insofar as they participate in the whole, not separately from it. The phenomenon of being able to see either the part or the whole, but not both at once is well known to aestheticians. One famous example, cited by both Michael Polanyi and E. H. Gombrich, is that of an experiment made by Sir Kenneth Clark with "Las Meninas," a painting by Velazquez. "Las Meninas" is quite rough in structure, making it necessary to view it from a distance. Clark hoped that while approaching it slowly, he would see it dissolve gradually into fragments. "I would start from as far away as I could, when the illusion was complete, and come gradually nearer, until suddenly, what had been a hand and a ribbon and a piece of velvet dissolved into a fricassee of beautiful brushstrokes."[39] "Try as he might, stepping

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[39]Polanyi, "What Is a Painting?", p. 660.

backward and forward, he could never hold both visions at the same time."[40] We can see the canvas and the blobs of paint focally, or we can see the painting. We cannot see them both at the same time.

The above experiment, suggestive as it is, demonstrates only that aesthetic objects are wholes, not that aesthetic features are wholes. Can we also say of aesthetic features that we cannot both perceive them and focally perceive their related non-aesthetic parts at the same time? To illustrate that we can, I shall consider a situation which looks, though only at first glance, like a counter-example. Suppose we see a delicate shade of red. Here, surely, one sees the part--red--and the whole--delicacy--at the same time. But if we consider this for a moment, we soon realize that here, too, we see the part only in its subsidiary function to the whole. The non-aesthetic feature, light red, has undergone a subtle but very real transformation, and is now seen, subsidiary to the whole, as a delicate shade of red.

Another interesting characteristic of gestalten is this, that once we have seen a gestalt it becomes difficult--if not well-nigh impossible--to see its parts otherwise than as functional to the whole. We have all seen paintings in which the shapes of things are hidden,

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[40] E. H. Gombrich, Art and Illusion, Bollinger Series XXXV #5, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 6.

landscapes, for example, in which dog's heads or sailing ships are cleverly concealed. But once such a dog's head has "sprung out" of the clouds at the viewer, it becomes extremely difficult to see just a landscape again. It takes a considerable effort on our part to get back to the parts once we have seen the whole, to see them as dis-integrated and non-participatory again. Alfred North Whitehead remarks that he is suspicious of an inferential model of perception because the artist, who is far better than most of us at contemplating pure colors or shapes, has acquired the ability to ignore temporarily the wholes of which such features are parts only by dint of laborious training. This point, incidentally, is quite as applicable to the second main question of this chapter as it is here. "We do not require elaborate training merely in order to refrain from embarking upon intricate trains of inference. Such abstinence is only too easy."[41]

Aesthetic features do indeed behave like we would expect gestalten to behave, which justifies our construing an account of their perception in terms of the perception of gestalten. This enables us to explain why the relationship between non-aesthetic and aesthetic features

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[41]Alfred North Whitehead, Symbolism: Its Meaning and Effect (New York: G. B. Putnam's Sons, Capricorn Books, 1959), p. 3.

is one of dependency, but not one of logical dependency. Furthermore, it gives us a model in terms of which to explain that dependency, the model of whole to parts. Aesthetic features depend on non-aesthetic features as wholes depend on parts. There would be no wholes if there were no parts. But at the same time, parts are not enough to explain the existence of wholes, for those parts have to be perceived in the right way. Naturally enough, we characteristically associate the parts which can be seen as aesthetic wholes with those wholes. Therefore, we associate particular non-aesthetic features with particular aesthetic features.

Let me proceed to sum up the main reasons, both those just above and those mentioned earlier in the thesis, why we should be willing to accept an account of aesthetic perception as the perception of gestalten. The advantages of such an account are the following: (1) It enables us to explain why there are characteristic associations between non-aesthetic and aesthetic features. It further enables us to explain just what sort of dependency there is between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features, i.e. that of the whole on its parts in the formation of a gestalt. (2) If our perceptions of aesthetic features are perceptions of gestalten, we would expect them to behave in certain ways. We have shown above that they do behave in those ways. (3) It enables

us to maintain that and to explain why the relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features is not one of logical dependency. It thereby enables to explain why we cannot infer the existence of aesthetic features from the existence of non-aesthetic features. (4) This account explains what the connoisseur is able to do as opposed to the man unable to see aesthetic features. The connoisseur is able to form aesthetic gestalten. It also explains why the connoisseur can use the teaching methods he can. (5) It allows for vast complexity in the influences on the perception of aesthetic features. It also allows for a highly complex account of what makes an aesthetic whole specifically aesthetic. With a phenomenon as complex as the aesthetic, attempting to account too simply for its multifaceted nature can only lead to monumental confusion. (6) This account of aesthetic perception demands the taking into account both of what is seen and of how it is seen, though admittedly I have placed great emphasis on the latter in this thesis. The traffic is definitely two-way. Trying to explain one without the other is like asking whether the chicken or the egg came first. Contrary to popular belief, there is an answer to that question. The answer is that neither came first. If they hadn't evolved together, we wouldn't have either.

Now it only remains to be asked whether Sibley would be likely to agree or to disagree with this account. With regard to this, I shall briefly reiterate his major claims. (1) Sibley insists on a distinction between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features. (2) Taste, he maintains, is the ability to perceive that an aesthetic object has aesthetic features. Not only is taste not the ability to infer the existence of aesthetic features from that of non-aesthetic features, but it is not possible to infer the existence of aesthetic from non-aesthetic features. (3) While there is a relationship between aesthetic and non-aesthetic features such that aesthetic features depend for their existence upon non-aesthetic features, this relationship is not one of logical dependence. Let us consider whether Sibley and I are in conflict on any of these points.

(1) I am in agreement with Sibley that there is a distinction between aestheric and non-aesthetic features, at least insofar as they are perceived. Without such a distinction, this thesis could never even have been begun. I would not want to maintain that the two sides of the distinction cover every possible sort of feature. There may well be features which are neither aesthetic nor non-aesthetic. Sibley himself nowhere maintains that the two categories embrace all possibilities.

Besides simply agreeing with Sibley that there is such a distinction, this account offers a way of working out the distinction, i.e. by regarding non-aesthetic features as gestalten of which non-aesthetic features are the parts. Since Sibley himself considers aesthetic features to be emergent features, he would not be likely to disagree in principle with this way of working out the distinction. Whether he would be likely to agree or to disagree with the details of this working out will be taken up under point (3).

(2) There is certainly no disagreement with Sibley in this thesis on the point that aesthetic features are perceived rather than inferred. We are unable to infer the existence of aesthetic features from non-aesthetic features because it is impossible to infer the existence of a whole from the existence of its parts. A gestalt occurs not simply because its parts exist, but because those parts are perceived in certain ways. The necessary manner of perceiving which enables us to perceive non-aesthetic features as aesthetic wholes is not arrived at by inference. It is rather made possible for us by dint of an apprenticeship we have served, assimilating our entire environment.

(3) The relationship between aesthetic features and non-aesthetic features is one of dependence, but that dependence should not be construed as logical dependence.

So far, Sibley would agree. Further, the dependence of aesthetic on non-aesthetic features can be understood in terms of the dependence of a whole on its parts. Here, too, I think it not unlikely that Sibley would agree. But when we turn to Sibley's own characterization of the dependence of aesthetic on non-aesthetic features, we find what may be a point of real disagreement.

Sibley maintains that the aesthetic features of a thing are <u>determined</u> by its non-aesthetic features. It is difficult to tell in just how strong a sense Sibley wishes to use this term, but from his characterization of the two sorts of relationships holding in the case of specific objects, he may be using determined in quite a strong sense. With regard to both total specific dependence and notable specific dependence (see pages 10-11), he speaks of the aesthetic character of a thing resulting from its specific non-aesthetic features. If he means here that aesthetic character results solely from specific non-aesthetic features, then we have found a point of real disagreement.

I maintain that to understand the perception of aesthetic features, they must be construed as gestalten. But as has already been pointed out several times, a whole is more than the sum of its parts. In the formation of a gestalt, the parts must be arranged in a certain way. The arrangement of those parts in a whole does not depend

on the parts themselves, but is rather dependent on the way in which they are perceived. Therefore we cannot maintain that the parts of an aesthetic whole are solely responsible for its aesthetic character.

It may be, however, that Sibley does not mean that aesthetic character results solely from specific non-aesthetic features. Indeed, to maintain such a position would weaken his point that the existence of aesthetic features is not able to be inferred from the existence of non-aesthetic features. He may mean only that there must be certain non-aesthetic features before a specific aesthetic gestalt can be formed, leaving open the reservation that no gestalt formation is possible without the parts being perceived in a certain way.

I think it not unreasonable for us to interpret "determined" in this latter, less strict sense for the following reason. It has already been pointed out that Sibley himself considers aesthetic features to be emergent, or gestalt, features. The problem is whether he would be likely to object to the emphasis placed by this account on the capacities of the perceiver. There is at least a good possibility that he would not object, for he says himself that "many 'emergent' properties clearly depend for their recognition on obviously related knowledge and experience, emotional, linguistic, etc. . . . One <u>could</u> not expect this recognition from a child or a

person lacking certain broadly specifiable experience and development."[42] If we may interpret determination in this sense, then as far as I can tell, there are no serious discrepancies.

Some might think it possible, it should be pointed out, that Sibley would consider such a position as this to rule out any serious claims for objectivity in aesthetics. Since his insistence that aesthetic features are determined by non-aesthetic features reflects his desire to retain objectivity in aesthetics, he would doubtless consider an account which rules out the possibility of objectivity in aesthetics to be seriously at fault. For that matter, I would consider an account which rules out the possibility of objectivity in aesthetics to be seriously at fault. I do not, however, think that this account does have that fault, so that perhaps Sibley and I do not need to disagree on this point. For a somewhat more detailed discussion of this issue, see the upcoming conclusion.

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[42]Frank N. Sibley, "Objectivity in Aesthetics," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society Supplement, 1968, pp. 39-40.

CONCLUSION

What has been offered so far is a model of perception in terms of which we can best provide an account of aesthetic perception. Such an account would enable us to differentiate between the perception of aesthetic features and the perception of non-aesthetic features. It is perhaps not the least feature of such an account that it would have some bearing on other problems in aesthetics. In conclusion, I should like to discuss three of these issues, briefly sketching out the controversies involved, then just indicating the approach to each suggested by this account of aesthetic perception. The issues to be discussed are these: (1) The issue of what constitutes the aesthetic object. (2) Isolationism versus contextualism. (3) Objectivity versus subjectivity. The account of aesthetic perception offered here enables us to adopt what might be described as a middle of the road position with regard to these issues, which, to my mind at least, constitutes a distinct advantage.

(1) The question of what constitutes the aesthetic object is a highly controversial one in aesthetics. (I say aesthetic object rather than work of art because I have no wish to limit the realm of the

aesthetic to the man-made. But what has been said here about the aesthetic object could just as well be said about the work of art.) There are many theories offered as to what precisely constitutes the aesthetic object. They can, however, be divided into two distinct types, those which identify the aesthetic object with some physical object, and those which identify the aesthetic object with some sort of mental object. The latter type seems to be more popular among modern aestheticians.

Those who wish to identify the aesthetic object with an associated physical object have one great advantage, ease in stipulating what at least some aesthetic objects consist in. Paintings consist of paint on canvas. Sculpture consists of carved stone, carved wood, cast bronze. Literature consists of the printed page. This identification becomes more difficult to make, however, when we move on to such aesthetic objects as those which are sometimes called the performing arts. It is a little more difficult to identify music with notes on music sheets, drama with written dialogue and stage directions, dance with the choreographer's notes. We might be able to get around this difficulty by maintaining that the performances themselves are the objects to be identified with the aesthetic object. But this is using the term object in a less concrete sense than paint on canvas or the printed page. If the performance

were considered to be the aesthetic object, one would be curious to learn just what it was of which the performance was a performance.

The difficulty involved in modifying the notion of physical object to fit the performing arts, however, pales into insignificance beside the difficulties inherent in identifying the aesthetic object with something other than the physical object. Two well-known examples of the claim that aesthetic objects are somehow mental objects are R. G. Collingwood's identification of the aesthetic object with an "imaginary object" and Stephen Pepper's identification of the aesthetic object with a "perceived picture." Let me very briefly (perhaps unfairly, but I wish here only to sketch a point) describe their positions.

Collingwood maintains that aesthetic objects are imaginary objects. He does not seem to mean, though, that they are imaginary in the sense that, say, unicorns are imaginary. He says of music,

> The noises made by the performers and heard by the audience are not music at all; they are only means by which the audience, if they listen intelligently (not otherwise) can reconstruct for themselves the imaginary tune that existed in the composer's head. . . . What we get out of the concert is something other than the noises made by the performers . . . what we get out of it is something which we have to reconstruct in our own minds, and by our own efforts; something which remains forever

> inaccessible to those who cannot or will not make efforts of the right kind. . . .[43]

There is, he insists, nothing strange about these observations. These are things we all know perfectly well.

Collingwood may know these things perfectly well, but I am afraid I do not. Certainly I am not totally unsympathetic to his position. I would be the last to disagree with his point that we must make "efforts of the right kind" which enable us, to some extent at least, to hear the music. But I do not agree that the sounds made by the musicians are not the music at all, that the aesthetic object is something entirely different from the performance we commonly associate with it. For one thing, it seems to me not altogether ludicrous to maintain that aesthetic objects are located. If someone were to ask me where to find a particular painting, I would not tell him that he would find some paint and canvas on the north wall of the second floor of the art gallery, but that he would find the painting in his imagination. For another thing, the claim that the music is not the noises seems to imply that I do not hear the music but imagine it instead. This does not strike me as being prima facie obvious. I may not hear noises and music at the same time, I may hear noise as music, but what I

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[43]William E. Kennick, Art and Philosophy (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 100.

hear <u>is</u> music. In fact, when music is being played, I probably couldn't hear noise if I tried. Finally, were we to insist on the aesthetic object being imaginary in Collingwood's sense, it would be hard for us to say that we ever experienced the same aesthetic object (as anybody else or as the tune in the composer's head). We could say no more than that we heard the same noises. Not only is this unsatisfactory in itself, but it might well do serious damage to any claims for objectivity in aesthetics.

Stephen Pepper's analysis of the aesthetic object begins with a subject, S, a physical object, O, and the perception of the physical object at various times, P_1, P_2, P_3, etc.

> In some sense in perception a physical object does get in touch with a subject . . . and . . . you or I do get in touch with a physical object. We see the picture, and what we see is the result of ourselves and the physical object somehow getting together. . . . The repeatedly perceived picture, however, it should be noticed, is not a continuant. . . . And what is particularly striking about this situation is that it is the <u>perceived picture</u> . . . that is the object appreciated. . . . The central aesthetic object turns out to be an intermittent object made up of fugitive successive perceptions.[44]

In dealing with aesthetic objects, "we are dealing with perceptions." [45]

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[44]Ibid., p. 110.

[45]Ibid., p. 111.

I am not unsympathetic to Pepper's claim that we are dealing with perceptions. But I would be no more inclined to tell the fellow I sent to the second floor of the art gallery that he will find the painting in his fugitive successive perceptions than I was inclined to tell him he would find it in his imagination. Further, the point can be made here with effect that one sees the painting. It is one thing to say that one appreciates or makes judgments about the perceived picture, but quite another to say that one sees the perceived picture. I may see things, or arrangements, or relationships, or qualities, etc., etc., but not my perceptions of these things. It seems to me that any position which even remotely suggests that I see myself seeing or hear myself hearing is growing unnecessarily complex. Further yet, I must admit that I find it difficult to accept that while no one is appreciating his perceived picture of it, the Mona Lisa doesn't exist (let alone that it isn't hanging in the Louvre). Finally, as Pepper himself points out, the perceived picture is quite liable to change, P_1, P_2, etc. may, for example, have a cumulative effect. This makes it not implausible, I think, that the aesthetic object may not be the same from one P to the next. That this may possibly be detrimental to a claim for objectivity in aesthetics has already been pointed out.

I have already said that I am not completely unsympathetic to these accounts. Perhaps Collingwood and Pepper have gone somewhat to extremes thanks to the perfectly valid realization that non-aesthetic objects such as paint on canvas are not sufficient to account for our perceptions of aesthetic objects. But we need not go on because of this to maintain that the aesthetic object is something <u>other</u> than the non-aesthetic object. We can account for this phenomenon more simply by saying that the aesthetic object is the non-aesthetic object <u>seen in a certain way</u>, i.e. in an aesthetic way. This enables us to differentiate between aesthetic objects and non-aesthetic objects while admitting that our perceptions and our imagination have much to do with the constitution of aesthetic objects. Furthermore, it enables us to do so without falling into any of the pitfalls pointed out above. It enables us to locate paintings on gallery walls again rather than in our heads (or nowhere, depending on one's view of the location of mental objects). It enables us to hear or see or feel the aesthetic object again. We are able to say that the Mona Lisa exists whether we are appreciating a perceived picture of it or not, giving up a responsibility which I, for one, am just as glad to relinquish. Finally, we now have excellent reason for maintaining that we see (or hear or feel) the same aesthetic object from one

perception to the next, thereby re-opening the door for objectivity, of which more later.

(2) The issue of isolationism versus contextualism is another controversial issue in aesthetics. The issue usually arises with regard to the interpretation of aesthetic objects, though I think it must arise at a more basic level, of which more later. Generally speaking, isolationists contend that every aesthetic object must stand on its own. They consider that an aesthetic object is defective if its meaning cannot be derived from a careful perusal of the object itself, without reference to any outside information. Such information they consider to be irrelevant at best. One well-known proponent of this position is Clive Bell. Contextualists, on the other hand, maintain that it is foolishly self-limiting to reject any helpful information which would enable us to better comprehend or appreciate the aesthetic object. Such information could include knowledge of other works by the same artist; information about the tradition or school the artist belonged to; information about the epoch to which the aesthetic object belonged, its history, its ideas, etc.; and that isolationists' bogeyman, the artist's intentions. A proponent of this position is H. D. Aiken.

The question I should like to ask, apropos of the account of aesthetic perception this thesis provides,

is whether it is possible not to be a contextualist? The answer, I think, is no. The isolationist seems to presuppose that we can somehow perceive the aesthetic object purely, unaffected by such factors as culture (the more cultured, the more likely to have information of the sort the contextualist considers relevant), education, and past experience. But as we have seen, even something so basic as our perceptions of aesthetic objects--let alone our interpretations--is affected by such factors, more, is not even possible without the influence of such factors. How, then, could we expect the much more complex process of interpretation to take place unaffected by such factors. Such influence may, of course, be unconscious. We need not be aware of it to have it affect us. Perhaps it is this non-necessity for conscious awareness of such information that makes it seem irrelevant to the isolationist.

It is possible that the isolationist would agree that the process of perceiving and interpreting aesthetic objects is influenced by the aesthetic manner of perceiving, but that the aesthetic manner of perceiving cannot be reduced to other factors. It is not impossible that the aesthetic manner of perceiving has something unique about it, such that it cannot be reduced to other factors. To establish this, however, would not be to establish the irrelevance of other factors.

To maintain that such factors are relevant, however, is not to let the contextualist have it all his own way, if what he has in mind is to put together a set of absolute interpretive criteria rather than just a set of guidelines. This account of aesthetic perception leans heavily toward substantiating Wittgenstein's claim that in order to describe what aesthetic appreciation consists in, we would have to describe the whole environment. Aestheticians have found that notoriously hard to do by means of three or four factors.

(3) Perhaps the most controversial issue in all aesthetics is that of objectivity versus subjectivity. One area in which this issue arises is with regard to aesthetic value. I would prefer not to concern myself with this side of the issue, though I consider it not unlikely that a gestalt theory of aesthetic value might well prove adequate to deal with the problem. The question I wish to consider is whether aesthetic features are objective or subjective. Obviously, any account of aesthetic perception would be the better for enabling us to retain at least a degree of objectivity in aesthetics. Let us see whether this particular account enables us to do so.

The desire to be able to assert the objectivity of aesthetic features is probably not the least of Sibley's concerns when he maintains that the existence

of aesthetic features is determined by the existence of non-aesthetic features. In general (though not always in particular), non-aesthetic features are conceded to be objective in some sense or other. If, therefore, they are the sole determining factors of aesthetic features, then aesthetic features would in general be conceded to be objective, in some sense or other. But according to this thesis, one of the determining factors of the aesthetic feature is the way in which the associated non-aesthetic features are seen. The question with which it becomes necessary to deal is whether the acceptance of this determining factor necessitates the sacrifice of objectivity. I think that--fortunately--it does not necessitate such a sacrifice. I shall endeavor briefly to sketch some reasons for thinking so, asking that it be borne in mind that this is only a sketch, intended to be suggestive rather than conclusive. Any attempt to deal conclusively with this subject would need to be a thesis in itself, and a vast one at that.

To begin with, let us return to the source, and consider briefly what Sibley considers objectivity to consist in. According to him, the primary question which must be answered in the affirmative to establish objectivity is "whether we use or attempt to use aesthetic concepts with elements of an objective logic, requiring some agreement and explanations of

disagreement. . . ."[46] This supposes that there must be, with regard to the use of aesthetic concepts, certain conditions of agreement. Whenever these conditions, whatever they may finally consist in, are met, we have the right to expect agreement. And, presumably, we should be able to explain cases of agreement and disagreement by reference to these conditions. The nucleus of agreement may be small, but it is not the size of the nucleus which gives it its claim to objectivity; rather it is its consistency of performance.

The conditions of agreement in aesthetic perception are quite complex, which virtually assures the existence of substantial disagreement, but this should not trouble us. "Indeed, it would be absurd to require, for a thing to be <u>really</u> Ø, that Ø must be discernible by beings lacking the obviously relevant knowledge and experience."[47] Furthermore, when the conditions of agreement are quite complex, we should not expect agreement to be primarily a yes or no affair, as it is for example where persons are required to distinguish between red and green. We should rather expect various shades of agreement, as persons come closer to meeting the conditions of agreement. "There will be a nucleus,

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[46]Sibley, "Objectivity in Aesthetics," p. 44.

[47]Ibid., p. 46.

and a large and variable penumbra consisting of groups exhibiting partial and merging agreement corresponding to what we ordinarily call areas of limited sensibility and levels of sophistication."[48]

Now, let me offer a brief account of whether objectivity can be claimed consistently with this account of perception, giving some consideration to whether it is consistent with Sibley's account of objectivity in aesthetics. If the way in which non-aesthetic features are seen is such an important factor in the perception of aesthetic features, how are we able to maintain that objectivity is possible? In the first place, it has not at any point been maintained, nor does the account so far offered require us to maintain, that the way in which the thing is seen is the sole determinant of any aesthetic feature. If there were no non-aesthetic features, there would be no aesthetic features. The non-aesthetic features are also determinants. Insofar as we consider non-aesthetic features to be objective, and insofar as non-aesthetic features do determine aesthetic features, we are that far justified in considering aesthetic features to be objective. Certainly, Sibley would not disagree so far, for as has been pointed out, he himself asserts the dependence of aesthetic

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[48]Ibid., pp. 46-47.

features on non-aesthetic features, and he probably does so at least in part to establish their objectivity. The point at which a difficulty will arise, if it arises, is at the point where the perceiver contributes to the perceptual process, so arranges the non-aesthetic features as to form the perceptual gestalt which is the aesthetic feature. Will Sibley balk here? I think not, for Sibley himself speaks throughout "Objectivity and Aesthetics" of the need for certain mental conditions of experience, education, etc. to be met before the person looking at an aesthetic object will be able to perceive its aesthetic features. There is often, he says, "the need of perusal, of prolonged attention, of trying, if one is to see aesthetic features."[49] It seems to me, at least, that Sibley clearly recognizes the necessity that the perceiver contribute to the perceptual process in order to perceive aesthetic features.

The objection that the necessity for "trying" removes the possibility of objectivity from aesthetics must come from other sceptics. Why is such an objection raised? Many sceptical aestheticians seem to think that the admission of the perceiver's contribution extends to allowing as valid any contribution on the part of the perceiver, that if we try, we can perceive anything.

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[49]Ibid., p. 36.

But it is not the case that any random group of non-aesthetic features can be correctly seen as any aesthetic feature we please. We are no more forced to this conclusion than we are forced to say that the duck/rabbit can just as well be seen as a hippopotamus or a chimpanzee. Even a not-so-random group of non-aesthetic features need not add up to a specific aesthetic feature. The non-aesthetic features which can be seen as insipidity are quite similar to the non-aesthetic features which can be seen as delicacy. In spite of this similarity, it is only possible to see those non-aesthetic features which are the partial determinants of insipidity as delicacy or vice versa mistakenly. (Our ability to make such fine distinctions is itself an argument for objectivity.)

The key observation here is that we are able to be correct or to be mistaken in cases of this sort. It leads us to what is probably our best reason for maintaining that that the adoption of the way in which something is seen as a determining factor does not entail the sacrifice of objectivity. There can be both correct ways and mistaken ways to see something. When a color-blind man sees a traffic signal as grey instead of green, we feel no qualms about saying that he is mistaken. No more need we feel hesitant about saying that man is mistaken who sees delicacy as insipidity or vice versa. When we see that an aesthetic object is delicate, our

perception is a process of gestalt formation. There are reasons why that particular gestalt formation takes place, such that if anything essential is missing from the process, we will fail to see that the aesthetic object has that certain aesthetic feature. We do not hesitate to say that the color-blind man sees grey when he looks at green because there is something wrong with his perceptual process. We need have no more hesitation in saying that a man who sees delicacy as insipidity has something wrong with his processes of perception as well. Admittedly, it may not be as easy to point out just what is wrong. Unlike the case of color-blindness, which results from an easily pin-pointed physical disability, aesthetic blindness may result from a deficiency in any of the complex influences which enable us to see things aesthetically. But the complexity of the task of pin-pointing the deficiency makes it no less a deficiency. And surely our ability to say that someone has made a mistake--or for that matter has been correct--in how he sees the feature at issue amounts to our being able to be objective.

I can see no reason why Sibley would want to disagree with this. In fact, it reiterates some of his main points, for example, that there are certain conditions of agreement which, when met, enable the person observing an aesthetic object to perceive its aesthetic

features and to agree with others who meet those same conditions that it has those features. Furthermore, the account of perception offered in the previous chapters amplifies Sibley's account of objectivity by telling us where to look to determine how the perceiver arrives at the condition necessary to the perception of aesthetic features. When we realize that in perceiving an aesthetic feature we are forming a perceptual gestalt, we know that the conditions we seek to explain lie in the process of gestalt formation and can be explained in terms of the influences on that process. Of course, Sibley would not wish to maintain that simply knowing the conditions for aesthetic perception would enable anyone to perceive aesthetic features. But surely it is clear by now that I would not wish to maintain that either. What he and I both wish to maintain is that our ability to explain, to some reasonable extent, the process of perception which results in our seeing the aesthetic features of an aesthetic object, our ability to state the conditions which, when met, assure our being able to see aesthetic features, enables us to claim objectivity for aesthetic perception. This is because the ability to state those requisite conditions for the process of gestalt formation to take place enables us to state that the process has taken place correctly or that there has been a mistake in the process, that we have been correct or mistaken —

about what we perceived. Surely, as I have already said, this amounts to our being able to be objective.

But someone is bound to object here that even if we are able to say that we are correct or mistaken, any contribution made by the perceiver to aesthetic perception renders it subjective. To that, I can only shrug my shoulders and agree. I must confess, however, that I am not much afraid of such subjectivity. Which, considering that this account applies not just to aesthetic perception, but to all perception, is probably just as well.

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